MIDLIFE CRISIS ERA HC

FÖRWÄRD

gasmask terror

Punk Fanzine

Vol. 2

HARAM

MidLife Crisis Era Hardcore Vol. 2 aka. Everyone Needs a Hobby/Excuses, excuses, excuses…
2019 finds me in an interesting place in life and with my relationship to punk, all of which has had a pretty profound effect on my ability to get this issue done. The Haram interview beginning on the following page is a prime example of why I really should *NOT* be doing a fanzine. Back in the fall of 2016 (yes, sixteen—not a typo) when Haram kindly agreed to do an interview before a Toronto show, I'd recently moved from a more stressful position at the college where I work back to teaching full time. Somewhat naively, I envisioned a fanzine as something I could undertake with my newfound "free time" such as it exists for a college teacher. Cue visions of being a punk renaissance man going to shows, seeing more bands again, and devoting a bit of time to putting together a zine. In lieu of doing a band—something which sadly doesn't really seem to be an option where I live—I thought mustering up a few hours here and there to work on a zine should not be too much of a problem. Little did I know… Fast forward about a month after doing the Haram interview and I'm about to head into work on three hours of sleep after an Impalers show in Toronto. Still energized from the night before, I was pretty stunned when my wife of ten years (and partner since 2000) told me she was pregnant. This is a pretty serious curveball at the best of times, but as someone who saw retirement as little more than ten years into the future, let's just say that I selfishly did not take this news well initially (or, if I am to be perfectly honest, for quite some time to follow either! In the last two years I've become a father and car owner—big steps for someone who didn't even own a smartphone until 2017). Oh, and I pretty much said goodbye to those thin slivers of free time that I thought I could devote to working on a zine here and there. This doesn't fully excuse the delay—there have been innumerable additional hiccups and other larger challenges factoring into that involving illness and family, some of which will only worsen with time—but my sincere apologies to anyone who might have been waiting (anyone?) for not getting this done sooner. In 2019, punk remains inspiring, but far from the all-consuming obsession it once was and now at 48 years of age other things (my wonderful wife and beautiful boy, our dog, teaching) definitely take priority. (Hey, here's a fun punk twist on your standard expecting a baby conversation: "Whoa! You're going to be a dad! Dude, that's awesome! Congratulations! So, does this mean you're selling your records?")

Going forward into 2019, three of my mainstays for remaining connected to punk, MaximumRocknRoll as a print resource, Not Dead Yet fest, and Faith/Void space in Toronto are now gone. As it did for many others, MRR truly opened up worlds upon worlds for me when I started buying it in 1985. There were certainly a few periods since where I lost interest, but I've generally been willing to champion the mag whenever people who stopped reading it decades ago dismissed it. If anything, I thought MRR reached a high point again in recent years when Golnar Nikpour, then Mariam Bastani, and a bit later Grace Ambrose were at the helm—the latter period in particular had me more excited about MRR than at any point since the '80s. I love that punk remains a place where many begin to find their feet socially and politically (though, as a word of caution, this might result in you becoming a somewhat socially awkward adult!) and MRR and many of the bands it exposed me to was a large part of that process for me. Over the past decade, these outside connections became all the more important after moving to a medium-sized Ontario city where the kind of punk and hardcore that speaks to me is in terribly short supply (or if it currently exists at all, it's at some truly subterranean basement show level). It's not so much a painful admission as it is simply a fact of life at this stage: my direct day-to-day involvement with punk has never been more arm's length than it is now. Regardless of the spatial separation, I feel more positive about international punk and hardcore in the here and now than at any point since I started attending shows in the mid-eighties. (Well, OK, not so much in a *here = where I'm living* sense necessarily, but this is exactly where efforts like Not Dead Yet and Faith/Void came in.)

Further to the above point about punk in the here and now, I should add a few comments on the content this time around. As with the first issue, I had initially planned on including older interviews I'd done beginning in the late eighties in the zine, but I'm in a weird spot when it comes to hardcore punk nostalgia. As eager as I am to enjoy and even promote the efforts of others documenting the past, I'm not really interested in participating in the punk HC nostalgia cottage industry myself. Yes, it's vitally important that people tell their own stories and for documentation to happen both in real-time and in retrospect, but I'm not as excited about looking back as I am about some of the things happening now. There are plenty of people out there with longer and richer histories and wilder stories than I could share so I'm happy to leave that accounting to others. (Last issue I'd promised an old Negazione interview in this issue that I did in 1988, but I'm sure there's better to be found online.) Punk = now, at least if you want it to be.

Looking ahead, it's very up in the air as to whether I will do another one of these. There are many factors at play here, but most importantly my discretionary time to spend on punk is much more limited than it was before our baby boy joined us. Without getting too deeply into my feelings on bringing life into this world, thankfully my initial panic at the thought of having a baby myself was entirely misplaced. Yes, I'm scared half to death of being 63 when he's 16, but I can only hope we'll do our best regardless of the circumstances together. I realize it's hard to maintain a sense of objectivity where these things are concerned, but right now at any rate our boy is wonderful and any time lost to punk and spent on fatherhood will be time well spent. Nothing much beats how good some of the simple pleasures with him are (making him laugh, reading books to him while he sits on my lap) and for someone like me, whose standard response to the world has long been a mix of anger and fatalistic resignation, that's pretty great. Life hasn't exactly been easy at times in recent years for some reasons alluded to above, but I'm incredibly fortunate to have my immediate family in my life (along with coffee, records, and punk).Daragh

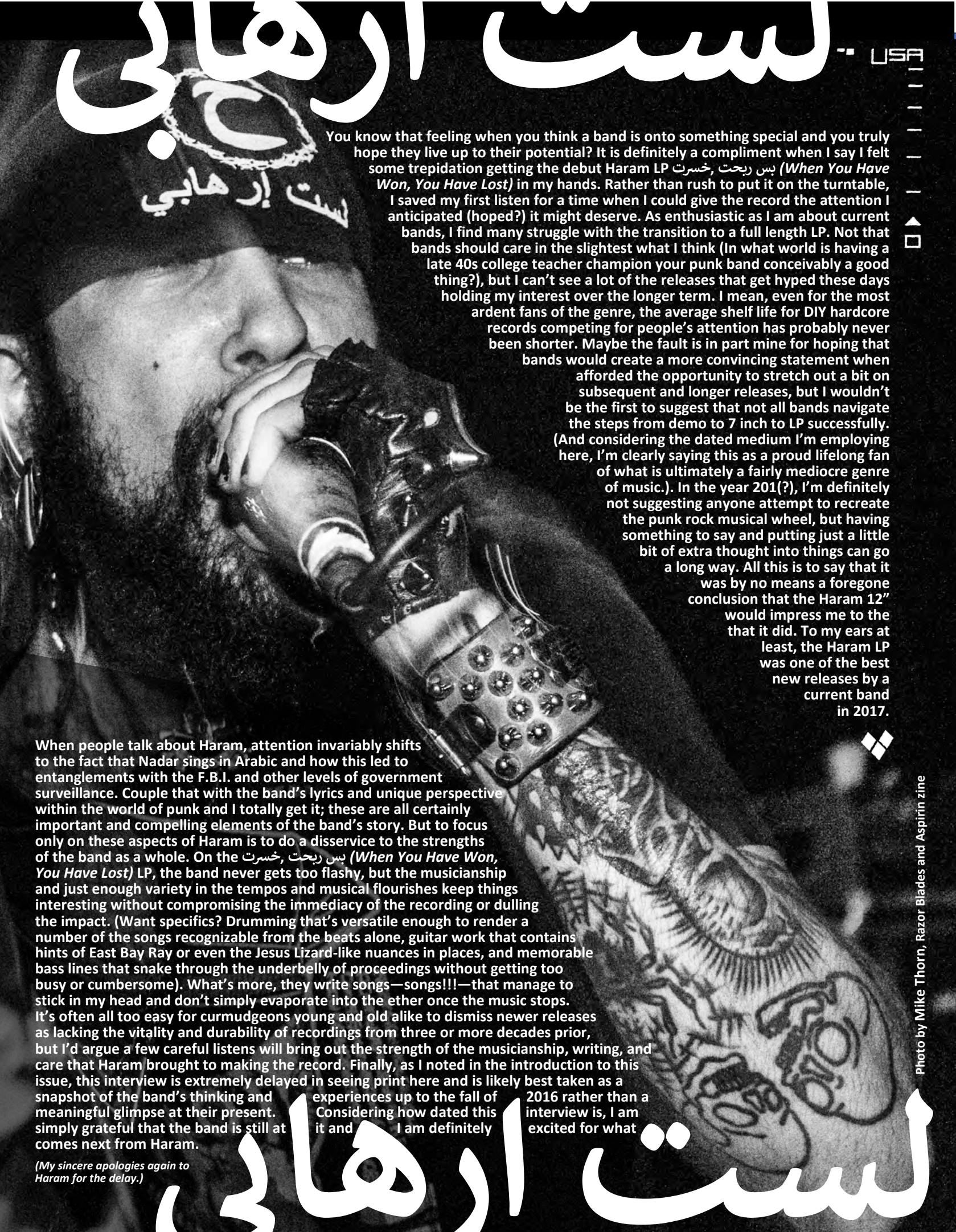
COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: *Forward* by **Philip Monahan**, *Haram* by **Lisa A. Walker**, *Gasmask Terror* by **Arnaud Dubois**. Title font ripping off **MRR**, background image swiped from **Faith/Void shop** (RIP and RIP in tribute).

BIG THANKS! Interviews: Nadar & James from HARAM, Souichi from FORWARD, and everyone in GASMASK TERROR
Proofreading: Tim Freeborn *(https://uncommitted.bandcamp.com/releases)*
Photographers *(in alphabetical order)*: **Arnaud Dubois** *(www.flickr.com/photos/unlogical_feeling/)*, **Alex Kress** *(@__alexkress on IG & www.flickr.com/photos/alexkressphotography/)*, **Philip Monahan** *(@phijomo on IG)*, **Mike Thorn** *(@razorbladesandaspirin on IG & razorbladesandaspirin.bigcartel.com),* and **Lisa A. Walker** *(@shotsfromthedark on IG & http://shotsfromthedark.com*). Thanks so much to all listed above and anyone supporting DIY punk in print in 2019.

@midlifecrisiserahc on IG midlifecrisiserahc.bigcartel.com midlifecrisiserahc@gmail.com

لست ارهابي

USA



You know that feeling when you think a band is onto something special and you truly hope they live up to their potential? It is definitely a compliment when I say I felt some trepidation getting the debut Haram LP بس ربحت, خسرت *(When You Have Won, You Have Lost)* in my hands. Rather than rush to put it on the turntable, I saved my first listen for a time when I could give the record the attention I anticipated (hoped?) it might deserve. As enthusiastic as I am about current bands, I find many struggle with the transition to a full length LP. Not that bands should care in the slightest what I think (In what world is having a late 40s college teacher champion your punk band conceivably a good thing?), but I can't see a lot of the releases that get hyped these days holding my interest over the longer term. I mean, even for the most ardent fans of the genre, the average shelf life for DIY hardcore records competing for people's attention has probably never been shorter. Maybe the fault is in part mine for hoping that bands would create a more convincing statement when afforded the opportunity to stretch out a bit on subsequent and longer releases, but I wouldn't be the first to suggest that not all bands navigate the steps from demo to 7 inch to LP successfully. (And considering the dated medium I'm employing here, I'm clearly saying this as a proud lifelong fan of what is ultimately a fairly mediocre genre of music.). In the year 201(?), I'm definitely not suggesting anyone attempt to recreate the punk rock musical wheel, but having something to say and putting just a little bit of extra thought into things can go a long way. All this is to say that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that the Haram 12" would impress me to the that it did. To my ears at least, the Haram LP was one of the best new releases by a current band in 2017.

When people talk about Haram, attention invariably shifts to the fact that Nadar sings in Arabic and how this led to entanglements with the F.B.I. and other levels of government surveillance. Couple that with the band's lyrics and unique perspective within the world of punk and I totally get it; these are all certainly important and compelling elements of the band's story. But to focus only on these aspects of Haram is to do a disservice to the strengths of the band as a whole. On the بس ربحت, خسرت *(When You Have Won, You Have Lost)* LP, the band never gets too flashy, but the musicianship and just enough variety in the tempos and musical flourishes keep things interesting without compromising the immediacy of the recording or dulling the impact. (Want specifics? Drumming that's versatile enough to render a number of the songs recognizable from the beats alone, guitar work that contains hints of East Bay Ray or even the Jesus Lizard-like nuances in places, and memorable bass lines that snake through the underbelly of proceedings without getting too busy or cumbersome). What's more, they write songs—songs!!!—that manage to stick in my head and don't simply evaporate into the ether once the music stops. It's often all too easy for curmudgeons young and old alike to dismiss newer releases as lacking the vitality and durability of recordings from three or more decades prior, but I'd argue a few careful listens will bring out the strength of the musicianship, writing, and care that Haram brought to making the record. Finally, as I noted in the introduction to this issue, this interview is extremely delayed in seeing print here and is likely best taken as a snapshot of the band's thinking and experiences up to the fall of 2016 rather than a meaningful glimpse at their present. Considering how dated this interview is, I am simply grateful that the band is still at it and I am definitely excited for what comes next from Haram.

(My sincere apologies again to Haram for the delay.)

Photo by Mike Thorn, Razor Blades and Aspirin zine

لست ارهابي

HARAM

The interview started with vocalist Nader talking a bit about his background.

Nader, vocals (N): I went to school in this place near Yonkers, New York. It was a Catholic school.

MLC: Oh!
N: Which served (as the source of) a lot of trouble in my life because I grew up a Shia Muslim. I was raised a Muslim and I went to Catholic school. When I was young it had a lot more of an effect on me than I would say now.

MLC: I wasn't raised so much Catholic Catholic but I went to Catholic school and it was bad enough just being somewhat cynical and questioning about the whole thing. But to add to that, I was recently talking to some people from my high school (online) and a friend told me that the father from our school committed suicide. I said, "Wow" and he said, "Yeah, after the conviction..."
N: Wow.

MLC: Yeah, so you can kind of see where this is going.
N: It happens quite a bit.

MLC: Oh yeah. This was a friend of mine and his best friend committed suicide—he was an alter boy. There's nothing that can be verified, but the conjecture is that his life had seemed good up to a point and then in relatively short order he became suicidal. It was sad because the guy was very slight, blond—you know, handsome, young boy...
N: Of course, that's very sad.

MLC: …and he kills himself.
N: And the father as well?

MLC: Well, the father actually had been shuffled elsewhere and he killed himself after being convicted in another town.
N: So it became public and then he...

MLC: Yeah, and it was only after he was found guilty. It was not enough to be judged only by God I guess.
N: But by the law.

MLC: I want to ask as well about your first exposure to punk and hardcore and the impression it had on you at the time. What aspects of it sort of drew you toward it and if there were any aspects that might also have repelled you at the same time in that initial exposure.
N: I actually grew up listening to mostly rap and hip-hop. My neighbourhood was like... I mostly hung out with neighbourhood friends and they mostly listened to that, so my first exposure to music was mostly hip-hop.

MLC: So what year? What period would this have been?
N: I'd say like when I was around like nine or ten, so early 2000s or late nineties. Oh, are you talking about which period of hip-hop?

MLC: Well, I was also wondering in terms of years because there were some people that I knew at one point in New York and they went from being B-Boys into the New York hardcore scene. (MLC: Hi Freddy Alva!)
N: Yeah, yeah, right. So there's that transition. I think that hip-hop and punk have many similar, common elements. Just by its nature and political understandings and movements around both kinds of music I think are very similar. So I think like early on—I read something about this recently—I think that kind of paved the way for me to have an interest in punk when I was finally exposed to it. I was around like fifteen or sixteen. It was kind of late in the game for me because I know most people are like, "Oh, I was like ten years old when I was listening to the Misfits and Minor Threat."

MLC: "My brother snuck me into Black Flag..."
N: Right, you know, started early. But for me it was pretty late in my life and it was very refreshing for me because I finally felt like I had found something that explained something I had in my heart that I couldn't explain really.

MLC: (In agreement) Oh yes.*
N: Which is something that maybe a lot of us might have felt. And it was so refreshing to me. I just felt, "Ah man, finally! Something like this exists?" And I just was obsessed with it ever since I found it, you know? It was just like a slow moving ball down a hill and from that point I just tried to find out more and more about it; couldn't stop.

MLC: And was it a very sort of sudden embrace where you divorced yourself from the interest in hip-hop entirely? Was it a night and day sort of shift?
N: No, actually, I still love hip-hop.

MLC: Some people swear off all that came before, right?
N: Right? And they stick to one thing. Actually, I'm fairly critical of that. I don't like when that happens. I know some people where it's like a natural transition sometimes where they're just interested in punk music, but for me I've always held onto things I've listened to in the past. It's more so than just nostalgia, I do sincerely think it's cool music and I've always held onto it. I still listen to a lot of hip-hop currently alongside punk. I think it's also like the area I grew up in and the area I still live in; there's a lot of hip-hop culture.

MLC: There's a possibility that my old band played in Yonkers.
N: No way.

MLC: We played in New York in 1991. We played with Born Against and Rorschach at ABC No Rio when they played their homecoming show at the end of their tour. The show after might have been in Yonkers, with Hell No—the ex-Citizens Arrest group—and Bug Out Society, but I'm not sure because it was a while ago. (MLC note: Since doing this interview I was contacted by someone who posted a clip of the Yonkers' show online. It doesn't hold up all that well.)
N: It's a little blurry. You know that band Breakdown? They came from Yonkers and I'm good friends with the bassist from Breakdown. I met him at a coffee shop in Yonkers.

MLC: Was this just random?
N: Random. I think he saw my leather jacket or something and we just started talking and he was like, "Yeah, I played in Breakdown, original line-up" and I was like, "Holy shit!" and we've been good friends for about two years now.

MLC: I was just hanging out with a friend earlier on today and he saw Straight Ahead when they played in Toronto in '87 and he was about to throw out the t-shirt he got because his wife was like, "Put that stuff in the garbage" and he was like, "Yeah, you're right." He had these Straight Ahead

(*My HC "Ah-ha!" moment? These might sound like cliché and pedestrian choices, but without a doubt DK's *Plastic Surgery Disasters* and Black Flag's *Damaged*. I had already owned *Fresh Fruit* and *Jealous Again*, but it was those second purchases from each band that really did it for me and—depending on the day—remain my favourite releases from each band.)

and Youth of Today shirts from ’87. Another friend said, “Let me put that on Instagram and see what interest arises.”
N: Vintage shirts.

MLC: Yeah.
N: Forget it, right? I bet you people will go crazy for that.
MLC: So a friend of his put them on Instagram and said, “A friend has these, is anyone interested?” A guy was like, “Well, what do you want for them?” and my friend was like, “Well, make me an offer” and he was thinking, “I dunno, like forty bucks?” He was just trying to get rid of it. The guy comes back with $600 and my friend was like, “Done!” (Laughter)
N: Sign on the dotted line. Holy crap.
James, drums (J): What is it really worth?

MLC: Oh, I don’t know.
J: Whatever somebody is willing to pay for it.
N: Six hundred bucks.
J: Does that guy think he’s getting it for a steal?
N: Possibly, but $600? That’s a lot for some t-shirts.

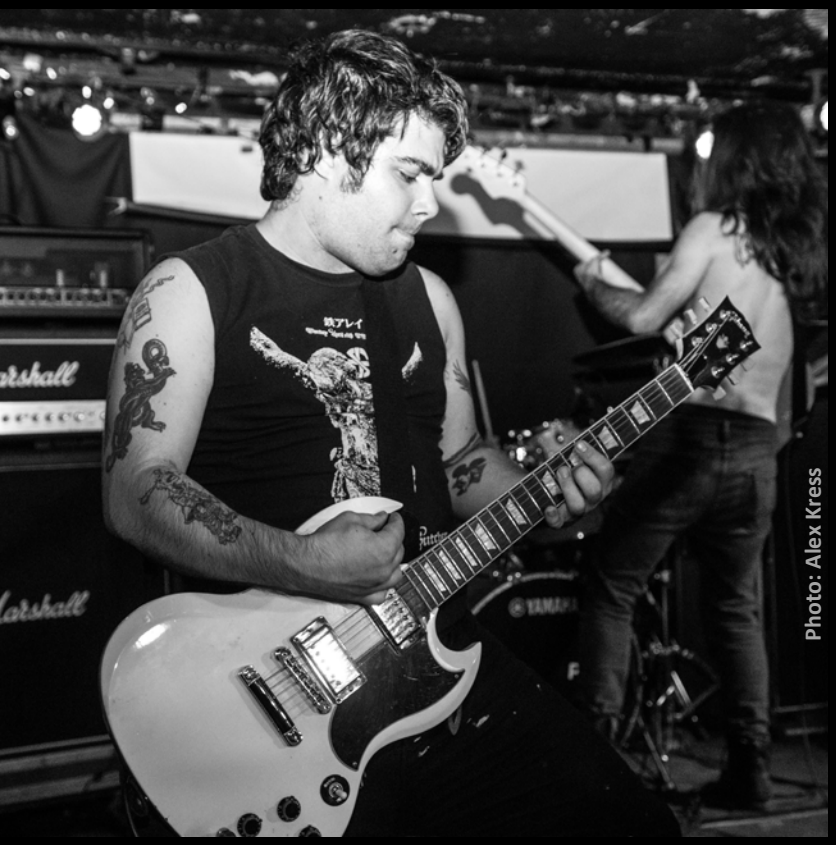


Photo: Alex Kress

MLC: Oh, it’s a lot, but the guy who purchased the shirts, his reasoning was that he has a competitor on the other coast and they have a bit of a rivalry as to who can collect these shirts and he was like, “Don’t put it on Ebay, don’t keep it online...”
N: Ah.

MLC: So for him I guess it was worth it and he had the wherewithal.
N: Ah, right, he had the incentive, the incentive of competition.

MLC: Yes, yes. (To James, drummer) So I was asking about initial exposure to punk and hardcore and what the attraction was initially and were there any elements that maybe also tended to push you away.
J: Well, I was exposed to punk... when I was a kid, I was living in Indonesia and a classmate was drawing—it’s a really cliché story—he was drawing anarchy signs on his textbook. It was the fifth grade, 1998.
N: It sounds like we had the same classmates.
J: A lot of the kids that were a bit older than me who were friends with my sister; they were three years ahead of me, were really into the nineties’ wave of more popular punk music like stuff on Fat Records. That was, as it was for a lot of kids my age, my first exposure to punk. And I quickly... We moved from Indonesia to New York, and that interest in punk and bands like Bad Religion quickly evolved into now being in New York City and being around a whole thriving punk scene and my interest evolved quickly into more I would say interesting bands. Like my really first interest in punk truly was with UK ’82 bands that I still like now, so maybe I stopped growing up pretty early.

MLC: Well, some of the stuff I was listening to (when I was younger), I love it all the more now. I never would have guessed that the bands I loved at fifteen that I love them all the more now, if for slightly different reasons. As for how crude and raw some of it seems, well, that only increases the charm. I would have thought that you just grow up and listen to jazz or something, which, you know, there’s nothing really wrong with jazz...
N: (Laughter) I dig jazz.
J: I tried to take that stuff more seriously and I’ve been in a wide circle coming back to stuff I liked when I was very young and I’m happier with this now than I have been doing any other kind of music.
N: What would you say turns you off about punk?
J: Oh, you know, when you’re lying on a kitchen floor feeling really nauseous...
N: This is last night.

MLC: And this morning.
J:…and you’re asking yourself what the fuck you’re doing. Could it be something more productive? More...
N: Those hours of the day that you’re questioning everything.
J: …more beneficial to me. A better way to spend my time in this life as I approach thirty years old. But you’re quickly drawn away from that if you go to a record store like Faith/Void and you see what your peers are creating, you see what you can be a part of if you...
N: Continue working hard.
J:…just week by week continue going to practice, working on new releases. It’s very motivating, to be able to make stuff.
N: That’s when it pays off.
J: To see stuff come out and enter the world is really, really a huge pay off.
N: Just playing a show and having people coming up to you afterwards and being like, “Thank you for playing, we’ve been wanting to see you.” These are things you don’t really hear about when you’re like on the kitchen floor, you know, suffering. (Laughter)
J: Well, you hear lots of different voices in your head sometimes.

MLC: And it’s not easy.
N: It’s not easy at all.

MLC: I mean people think that a relationship with a partner or a spouse is difficult, but it’s like having four or five partners on the go at one time.
N: Right. You have to maintain a certain amount of maturity and that can go very quickly depending on what the situations are that you go through as band. But it brings you closer in the end. Like with these guys, we went on tour in the Midwest in August and the first two days were great and towards the middle I was like, “Fuck, this is getting to be pretty hard

(Re: James’ initial exposure to punk—You want to know why I will never disparage younger people for listening to bands on Fat or Epitaph? Because in very short order they could be blowing my mind making records I love. Re: YOT ephemera—a former bandmate still has a Nerf football emblazoned with “Youth Crew Tour ’87” or something similar in marker that he stole out of Youth of Today’s van that year. XHa!X)

and crazy." But towards the end it was just like so refreshing to be able to go out there and just see people that might have known about us and being excited to see us, so that made it worth it and brought us all closer together. So that's really what made it all worthwhile.

MLC: Because in my experience it doesn't always work out that way.
N: No, exactly, and we're thankful. We're very grateful.
J: I think Nader's really lucky.
N: I'm extremely lucky.
J: To do your first tour and it went really well. We're lucky to have people thinking really positively about our music at the moment. But you know, part of this experience is also playing to empty rooms and traveling a long way and spending a lot of money and seeing nothing from it.
N: Sleeping on cold floors.
J: Yeah, and it gets pretty bad sometimes; it's not great. It's not necessarily the most rewarding way to spend your time, but if you do it for long enough it can become part of who you are and your identity and it can be hard to shake it after it becomes a habit. I don't think I'd ever really be comfortable not being involved with music. I think it'd be too hard to watch my friends go on having fun...
N: It'd be a void in my heart at least—specifically this band—I mean it's just done so much for me as a person because I've been able to express myself in a way that I've never really felt comfortable with.

MLC: This is something that I want to get into a bit more, but with Haram did the people come together first and then the ideas for the band evolved from there or was there an idea or concept in place prior to the individuals coming together?
N: It was definitely, like James and Mike... How did Mike meet you? Mike met you at a bar?
J: No, no, no. Um, I had just moved back to New York City. It had been maybe six months and I had been asking around and hassled John from Toxic State about finding band members and it really wasn't working. But you know, it hadn't actually been that long. And I was playing other music at the time just trying to stay busy and I ran into Mike and I was wearing a Nomad patch. And he was like, "Oh, you like Nomad?" and we started talking about punk music; this was at a coffee shop he worked at. And over time we just got chatting and I think we had a jam and we sat there and talked about what kind of music we wanted to make and we just wrote together for a little while trying to find a bass player and a singer. We played with some really (laughs) weird bass players and then Martin came on board, which was great. And Nader, probably before that, yeah, definitely before that because he's how we met Martin and Mike said, "We're trying to find a singer. I know this kid from Yonkers and he wants to sing in Arabic" and I said, "That's a bad idea, I don't want to do that" and it wasn't a bad idea. (Laughter)
N: I was really scared to do it too.

MLC: Why was that the initial reaction?
J: Actually, I had two voices in my head. One was, "Don't play in a punk band if you're going to do the same thing. You have to contribute something." I don't know, maybe I believe you have to add something to the catalog that's already out there and not make a cookie cutter impression of a certain sound. Because we're all very interested in certain specific eras of punk and that comes across in our music, but it wouldn't be enough for me to just do that. So on one hand I thought maybe they would see the Arabic as—being that three of us are not Arabic speakers, and we're not Muslim, and we're not from the Middle East, any of those things—I thought that it could become a little bit politically difficult. But we'll just deal with it, we just did it, and I think it has been a huge—obviously it defines the band—but it's definitely something that I'm so glad we are doing.
N: It's extremely important for me. Like when I first joined the band, I was extremely worried because I'd never sang in a band before and I'd never had the thought of singing in Arabic before, which is something I've always had the opportunity to do. You know, I grew up learning the language and I...

MLC: Well, you're from Lebanon originally?

N: No, I was born in New York.
MLC: Oh, I'm sorry.
N: No problem. My parents immigrated here in the late '80s. They fled the civil war in Lebanon. They came here and then I was born in Yonkers.

MLC: Was Arabic the first language at home then?
N: For the first five years of my life I didn't know English.

MLC: Fantastic! I mean, that is exceptional! As I mentioned before, I'm an English language teacher but I always say to my students, it's like, "This is the reason you and the grandparents are such a wonderful thing because you both keep the L1 or the first language alive and they unify the generations."
N: Yeah, they pass down the language and the culture, right? It's something that I'm very grateful for. I was very ashamed of that for a very long time, especially post 9/11. There was this mentality of integrating into the domestic culture as much as you can and kind of hiding your foreign side. For a good portion of my life, I was very reserved and didn't want to show anyone that side of me. So when Mike told me like, "Hey, we're starting this band, do you want to come try out?" and I was like, "Yeah, what do you think of this idea?" This was before Haram or any of the concept came up. It was just like, "Do you want to try singing?" and I tried it and it worked really well. I remember the first practice I walked out and I thought, "Wow, this is something that could work." There was a vibe, it was just me, James, and Mike, but even then I just knew that there was this sort of dynamic that was working in there. James was very supportive and Mike was digging it so I thought if we continue doing it maybe it will work and we all stuck to it. It ended up paying off, but it was obviously a long time before we actually got to where we are. We had to work really, really hard to get where we are.

MLC: Well, it's interesting because of what you are saying. For a lot of bands, the impulse to form a band it's almost by habit or routine because it's well, "What do you hope to achieve?" "Well, I want to record and I want to go on tour" rather than thinking about what they can do differently or what they can add to the conversation.* Or they might have something very specific in mind where they want to ape a particular style or genre entirely with no agenda beyond that aside from perhaps ego

*(*No joke, I once went to a very first band practice with some people in early spring circa 1997 and they started discussing buying a van and a summer tour before even stringing a few notes together. I was thinking, "Um, let's maybe make a song first? WAY TOO MANY bands tour before they're ready as it is." That ended up being my first and only practice with them and yep, they were soon on tour. Dummy that I am, I never managed to be part of another legitimate touring unit after an earlier band broke up in 1991.)*

gratification, right? (Laughs) And that's obviously an element of performing. So insofar as Haram and how the formation of the band went and approaching the lyrics in Arabic, what was the agenda or the concept as you guys saw it at the time?
N: Ah, right. When I first started the band, I was pretty much by myself in terms of creating a concept for the lyrics before. Now I always talk to James specifically and sometimes our bass player Martin about what the content should be or if this is a tricky thing to sing about or his views. But when we first started out the demo, the lyrics on the demo are very political. Most of the lyrics on that demo I derived from current events going on and in the past my experiences growing up and what I just see in the world today. I think it was a very crucial time for us to start the band at the time that we did because it was the start of (increased) Islamophobia in this country. It was the start of cultural division, just people not getting along with other people and starting to alienate them away from communities and seeing them demonizing them—the culture was just completely tarnished. So Haram was a way in my head for using the beauty of the culture and of the language and expressing that through music and I thought it was really powerful when we first started. I thought the demo did a good job of that, but the 7" that we just put out I think really encapsulates that whole idea. I really think that we went pretty far with that for that release and I think we did a much better job this time, and I think with the LP it's only going to get better. We're working hard on an LP right now.

Photo: Daragh

MLC: Was there an element as well where you're talking about Haram as a reaction to wider society and trends in political discourse?
N: It's mostly like foreign politics and also there's a huge domestic political meaning in there, too. I mean there are a lot of problems at home in New York and it's very visible and it had to do with that as well.

MLC: Well, was there any element where it was a reaction to experiences in the punk scene at just a more micro level?
N: The punk scene has always been very supportive of us. Our punk scene in New York, I mean everyone is very educated and keeps up and knows what's going on in the world and stuff and we got a lot of like, "What you're doing is really important. I'm so happy that there's a band doing what you guys are doing." So I've never really received any negative vibe.

MLC: Oh, fantastic.
N: Maybe before we started the band, I felt a little funny going to shows and having that idea. We were practicing when we first started out and I'd be like, "Ah shit, I don't know…." Like we hadn't played a show or anything, I'd think like, "Oh man, how are these people going to…? What are they going to think when we first play?" You know? "What is their opinion going to be?" But I just quickly threw that mentality out and focused on our own thing.

MLC: You mentioned the lyrics being a response to wider global situations. With the lyrics on the 7", like "What is this Hell?" at first glance you look at the translation of that lyric and it could almost be standard D-Beat fare with images of children's bodies on the beaches and what not, but singing them in Arabic and the artwork and everything it adds this other layer and this other context to things. So two questions here. Do you think that punk lyrics risk trivializing these sorts of situations around the world?
J: Yes, for sure.

MLC: And do you feel that maybe the lyrics have greater resonance by virtue of their language they're being sung in because they're coming from a band like Haram as opposed to maybe a band from the Midwest or just generic D-Beat band X from wherever?
N: That's a good question. (Pause)

MLC: There is almost like an overuse of certain imagery with D-Beat bands in particular where it's like they are sort of cashing in on the misery.
N: Certainly, yeah, like death and destruction and misery. It's something I talked to you (James) about. It's something I worry about a lot. I don't want to get lumped in with these people. On our demo we didn't translate our lyrics…

MLC: I was going to ask about this as well, yeah.
N: …specifically because I didn't want it to be seen like it was just a synthetic… just like doing it again copying the same imagery that a D-Beat band would do. Not really, I wasn't really worried about that, but like those lyrics specifically for "What is this Hell?" there's a very powerful image that I saw. It was a child, a Syrian refugee dead on the beach in Italy I believe. It was a famous photograph. (**MLC:** The beach was in Greece and the boy's name was Alan Kurdi.)

MLC: Well, there's a connection there to Canada.
N: Oh, is there?

MLC: Because the family… he had relatives in Canada and they had applied for asylum and they were denied. That helped shift some of the political currents here because the previous government here, the Conservative government, were very reluctant to accept refugees from Syria and one of the election promises of the government that came in last year was they said, "We will accept 25,000 refugees by year's end if we're elected."
N: The new Prime Minister Trudeau?

MLC: Yeah, Justin Trudeau.
N: Yeah, I've heard a few of his speeches and stuff.
J: And stop bombing Syria and Iraq or where ever the Canadian planes have deployed to fight ISIS. I think it was both countries or one or the other.

MLC: Well, one of the things that's traditionally been said about the Liberal Party is that when there's a campaign they campaign from the left but then they govern from the centre-right.
N: Wow.

MLC: So I mean have the policies changed all that much or is there just a sunnier, shinier disposition to things without that

(Have the left been let down by the Trudeau Liberals? If so, expecting too much from a centrist party would have been the first mistake. Still, however milquetoast of a progressive it might make me appear, when an election rolls around I'll continue to hold my nose and vote for whichever party stands the best chance of keeping more conservative forces out. Yes, Trudeau is annoying AF, but Scheer would be infinitely worse.)

much of a change? So there's a bit of cynicism as well about that, but that was a very pivotal image here with the election happening.
N: I just learned something.

MLC: But with the demo lyrics, there was a song "Without Eyes" (and the lyrics go) "Without eyes and I can see everything." I was talking with a co-worker and she said there's a similar concept in the Koran, so I was wondering if some of the concepts are derived from that perhaps and if you could elaborate on that.
N: Absolutely. The Koran is a huge influence and inspiration for me and that's where I draw a lot of concepts for the lyrics from. Specifically that song, I forget what the Surah is, what number in the Koran, but for me that song is more so like I see these people walking around kind of just like drifting through life and not really looking at anything as if they don't have eyes. They see something and they don't really think about it, it doesn't go past just observance, you know what I mean? That's how I felt people were looking at me sometimes. That song… That's some of my best lyrics for a song and we don't play it anymore because it's a really long song. (Laughter) But I didn't really directly read that Surah and the Koran, but I do know about it. But that song, it's a powerful one for me because it's drawn straight from my experiences growing up and I always felt invisible and I always had that opinion about people. I always felt that there are like these blinders on people just drifting through life and not really noticing anything. I like to hold myself as someone who is very observant, maybe a little too observant. Maybe I overthink it sometimes or just try to break it down to a few elements.

Photo: Alex Kress

MLC: But observant, are you observant in any sort of religious sense? Another thing I was talking to a colleague at work about and she said "Okay, I think there's a mistake here. They must have made a mistake with the photocopying because the Prophet's name is upside down on the lyric sheet."
N: That was just like I think a printing mishap, right? I don't know if we did that on purpose.
J: We had a discussion about that one. You didn't want it to seem overly religious by including it, so we turned it upside down.
N: Right, right, right. I remember now. It's been about a year since we put out the demo so it's a bit cloudy now.
J: It's the seal. It's not in the lyrics script, it's by itself on the lyric sheet and the tape cover.

MLC: My colleague said, "I think there's a mistake, because if that was on purpose then that would be very bad." So I thought I'd ask about that.
J: She could always turn the piece of paper around. That's about being observant.

MLC: And she wasn't sure who this was. (Looking at the lyric sheet together)
J: It's a poet. We now have a theme where we include little images of men—so far it's been men—in circles on our artwork. I really enjoy that theme were doing so on the EP it's…
N: Hassan Al Sabbah.
J: Hassan Al Sabbah who was the leader of the Hashshashin. He created his own Islamic sect and hid up in the mountains in the north of Iran.

MLC: Was he like an inspiration for Brion Gysin and Burroughs and things like that?
J: I believe so.

MLC: Because there was a line there—and I just got the 7" the other day—where (he said) "Nothing is true, everything is permitted."
J: Yes, that's his.
N: Yes, right.

MLC: I was first exposed to that through William Burroughs and those sorts of writers. I was not aware of that connection (to James), but I knew some of those writers spent time in northern Africa in Morocco.
N: That's a direct quote from *The Outsider*. (Camus, *The Outsider* --"Everything is true, and nothing is true.")
N: Going back to the Allah symbol on the insert, there is an element of Haram that I do want to talk about a little bit. I'm not out to insult Muslims in general, but I do not care about someone getting offended. If it's that meaningful a symbol, you should not get offended by it being turned upside down. For me, Haram is more of like a double controversy. In general in English if you don't understand it, if you are an English-speaking person, it's a bit intimidating because you have someone screaming at you in Arabic. On the flip side, if you do understand it as something offensive to you as an Arabic person, or as an Arabic-speaking person. So there is that double controversy that I like to bend and work out through our concepts and themes as we go along.
J: You know, I think the custom of inverting crosses is a little bit of a cliché and often not very well motivated. And we're certainly not a band that is unquestioningly anti-religious. It's more of just a critique—I think Nader and I have discussed this at length--the ways in which any faiths are used in the service of people's political intentions and motivations. It's more of a reflection on that and obviously I'm talking about fundamentalism. I think a lot of what Nader writes about is about the people who are caught in between these big forces. It's not a matter of critiquing the custom or the Scripture or anything like that. As Nader said before, it's… we don't exist in a vacuum. Like the band and its political commentary and its existence is tied to the fact that we have this long running civil war in Syria, we have the migration crisis in Europe

(Totally anecdotal aside here: As someone who has worked with Muslim learners in classrooms for many, many years, the notion that all Muslim women are docile, won't to speak their minds, or are afraid to publicly challenge men is utterly false. Yes, I'm basing this observation on a very select sample—Muslim women pursuing post-secondary educations—but my point remains that experience interacting with people in real-life would go a long way to dispelling facile stereotypes that remain rampant in the media and online.)

and the discussion about that in the US, in Australia, and your country.
N: And that's the war of our generation.
J: We have to… it's important for us in our music to respond to this. It comes back to your earlier question about like, what contribution is a D-Beat band who might play that style really, really well…
N: Convey that right, that imagery.
J: … to what extent should a band or can a band engage with…

MLC: Well, it can trivialize and desensitize people to these really heinous…
J: It's a bit detached from anything specific, it's just studying war in general, which is a trope of the genre. So yeah, we're quite conscious of that and try to do more than that.
N: And I love D-Beat music and a lot of my influence comes from that, but I think what I drew from that is taking that and making it more specific and bringing it to the contemporary genocides and wars that we have today in the world. Those affect me on a day-to-day basis and like every day there are at least like 100 people that you'll find between Iraq and Syria that will just die for just inconceivable reasons and it's something that we don't know about on this side of the world, that we're not exposed to here. A lot of people don't pay attention to that. That's really what we, what I specifically, bring attention to in Haram and I think so far it's been good. I think a lot of people understand what we are trying to convey and that's really a good feeling just to see that people care about that side of the world and seeing what happens there.

MLC: This idea of the compatibility of religion and punk rock music… Years ago I was interviewing Yeap (Enzyme, Krömosom) when he was in Pisschrist when I was living in Adelaide and I believe he's from Malaysia originally.
J: Yeah.

MLC: One thing I noticed when I was travelling in Southeast Asia is that it was very interesting to see black metal bands from that part of the world…
J: Or Oi! bands.

MLC: … and people of Islamic backgrounds embracing this anti-Christian aesthetic because that's part of the genre and one of the tropes as you said. You'd almost think it would be more legitimate if people were to criticize Islam and he said, "I don't think people are ready for that quite yet," you know?
N: It's a very untouchable area to start a punk band in… I think it takes a lot of courage to do that.

MLC: Well, I have even seen an all-female anti-Islam band from Saudi Arabia. It's so blasphemous.*
J: Really?
N: That's incredible.

MLC: Oh yeah, so I have seen that a little bit in some black metal circles to the extent where I wonder, "Does this actually really exist or is this just some sort of ruse that somebody has concocted somewhere?"
N: That's remarkable, I can't believe that.

MLC: Now you mentioned about the transition from the demo to the 7" and the lyrics are translated on the 7". What was the rationale for that shift? (MLC: The lyrics appear only in Arabic on the demo.)
N: We talked about that a lot actually.
J: Me bugging Nader.
N: Yeah. (Laughter) That was a heavy decision actually. I've always wanted to keep the lyrics in Arabic; I didn't want to translate them. I wanted people to approach me or go out on their own and kind of transcribe and translate them for themselves and do some work to find out what these like—as they see it probably-- just like symbols from a different language and see what meaning these things hold. For the 7" we decided to translate them just to have a clear point to the whole thing, you know?
J: It's important at this point in time because there is now…
N: The mystique is gone.
J: … a criticism or an attention that's being paid to what the band might be saying and it's important for us to…
N: Make that clear.
J: Not to confirm or to relieve anybody of any doubts or concerns, but to make it clear what our political stance is. Because as you might know, Nader was singled out for potential extremist beliefs without anybody actually translating the material, just looking at the language and the design and the colour composition itself and maybe the performance. I don't even know if they saw that.
N: Apparently so.
J: But they were alerted by simply putting Arabic on a black sheet of paper and putting it in a cassette tape. That's all you need to arouse suspicion. That's very surprising to me, but these are the times we live in.

MLC: How did that process unfold? Was it purely a matter of somebody seeing a lyric sheet and no translation was done? How did you even become aware that you were under investigation? What happened?
N: Well, ah, it was the day we left for our Midwest tour.
J: Oh fuck.

MLC: Timing, eh? (Laughter)
N: it was right before we were getting in the van, you remember that?
J: We were getting in the van to leave in front of the Acheron (venue).
N: We were getting in the van in front of the Acheron in New York City and I get a call from my uncle who I worked for for about a year or two and he told me, "Hey, there are FBI federal agents at the workplace, they're looking for you. They're asking if you still work here." I was like, "What are you talking about?" (He said) "Yeah, they just walked out with your work computer that you used to work on. They didn't really ask any questions." I was like, "Did they say anything?" He was like, "No, they were wondering where you were and they wanted to talk to you." I'm talking to him in a lot of Arabic in the car and everyone's getting super worried. I hang up the phone and my father calls me and says two federal agents went up to my parents' house asking where I was and asking if they were aware of the band, of Haram, and that's when—
J: Were they aware up until that point?
N: My parents were not aware.
J: Oh God. (Groans)

MLC: Oh they weren't aware you're in the band?
N: It's something I hid from my parents. My parents are very devote, spiritual Muslims.
J: You look pretty normal otherwise these days so they wouldn't really suspect you were doing anything.
N: (Laughter) Yeah. Me and my family have had a lot of falling outs over the last few months because of the band. Haram itself is a very powerful word.

MLC: Well yes, it's such a taboo.
N: It's very, very taboo, and that's the point of the whole band.

*(*Correction: The band I was thinking about, Seeds of Iblis, is purportedly from Iraq and featured two women in the lineup. Although I possess zero interest in keeping up with all things black metal, a quick online search revealed that the band's backstory was probably a hoax.)*

But more so on the investigation, so for the next ten days we went on the—

MLC: So you left regardless?
N: We left, oh yeah. We drove straight through the nation's capital on our first—
J: We were literally leaving. We weren't going to not go.
N: We were in the van, there was nothing stopping (us). If anything, at first I was very silent and depressed in the van because I had realized that what I was doing, just simply a few elements—
J: Existing.
N: Existing. Simply the few elements that we had been working with in our existence had attracted the attention of a federal agency. So I was pretty sad about that. But then I kind of found myself to be more empowered by that as the tour went along and the rest of the tour was great.

MLC: But how did this end up resolving itself? I mean you got back to New York and…
N: Yeah, we got back to New York a week after. I think it was a Wednesday and I didn't hear anything about it. And then I think it was that Friday two NYPD detectives came to my house. They called me on my cell phone and said, "Oh, we are at your house" and I was like, "I don't see you outside." They were at my parents' house again. They drove down to my house, I gave them my address. I was more than willing to talk with them. I wanted to have a sit down with them. I would like to answer any of their questions. I was more curious as to what they had on file. And this was the NYPD now. So they come…

MLC: So there were multiple layers.
N: Right. So it goes from federal to domestic, the local police. They come to my front door and they asked to come inside. I asked them if they have a warrant, they say no. I say I have roommates here, I don't want them to get worried or suspicious or anything, let's sit outside. So we sit on my stoop. The first thing they asked me was, "Do you sing in Haram?" I was like, "Yes." "OK, we'd like to ask you a few questions. The Federal Bureau of Investigation was conducting an investigation on you, but now they've dropped it down to a local level so we are now responsible for this investigation."

MLC: Not like that brings any sense of relief that.
N: No. (Laughter) Not at all. Two detectives is still bad. So they take out this manila envelope. And by the way, this story I was afraid to tell people at first, even my bandmates, because it's so far-fetched and absurd that I didn't think that anyone would believe what had happened. I mean it's very easy to think that maybe someone would say this just for sake of being like, "Oh, I was investigated, blah, blah, blah." But this is true and they came and they had an envelope and they opened the envelope and they had a headshot of me on the street walking. They had a snapshot of our Bandcamp. They had my internet search history and they had a picture of my headband. And apparently they told me they had a UC, an undercover cop, at one of our shows, which I don't buy it, but that he witnessed like radical behaviour and preaching and violence. So that was like right off the bat, that's everything they told me, and I started laughing. They were like…
J: It's a review.
N: Yeah, one of the best reviews we've gotten. Gotta thank the NYPD for that one.
J: Really? An undercover cop at our show?
N: Yeah, I feel like he would have sort of stood out like a sore thumb.
J: "Do you guys know where I could buy a marijuana cigarette?"
N: (Laughter)

MLC: I've had students ask me that.
N: Really?

MLC: Newly arrived students. "Wee, wee." I was like, "What?" "Where can I buy wee(d)?"
N: You would think they wouldn't ask the teacher, huh?

MLC: Exactly. I was like, "Look, I'm the teacher, you can't ask me that."
N: Yeah, like (he thinks) you're a nice guy so he's not going to get in trouble.
J: "You seem like a cool guy, man."

(**MLC note:** A few weeks after transcribing this I was approached by a couple of high school girls at a house show asking if I had weed. I had to say, "I'm 47, I'm a teacher. I'm the narc-iest looking guy here. Go talk to someone else."*)
N: Anyway, they continued to ask me like, "What do you sing about? Is anything you sing about anti-American in nature? What is this logo? What is the symbol?"

MLC: What's amazing is that with all that time and the multiple layers of law enforcement involved that nobody bothered to translate the lyrics.
N: This is one of the first things I told James when I called him directly afterwards. I was shocked the little they did to conduct their investigation prior to coming and confronting me. They had done no work at all. They had not translated… They didn't have, I'm shocked to even think they didn't have one Arabic speaker on their staff that could have taken a look at this and looked it over and maybe cleared…
J: Or even outsourced it.
N: Or even outsourced it. Nothing.

MLC: Well, when you think about the manpower already…
N: Right, to go all the way to my home and to ask me these questions was a bit absurd. I expected them to have specific questions about some things in the lyrics at the very least, and they did not. They asked me all these things. Just to continue on that, they were asking me what I sing about, all that stuff. They asked me if I had been out of the country, what my parents do, if I believe in anything that ISIS puts out there, if I read their monthly magazine, if I watch their videos online, if it inspires me, which was just so absurd to me. I mean, I was just sitting there shaking my head in disappointment really because I was like, "You completely miss the point and didn't do any of your job. Your work here is just complete buffoonery, you didn't do shit." It was just a shock to me. I had to sit down and I explained everything to them. One thing that stood out to me, they were like, "Oh, when we first walked up, you didn't look like a threat so we thought we had the wrong guy." Which makes me think that it's just another way of saying, "Oh, you don't look foreign or you don't look Muslim, so we thought we had the wrong guy. We saw your tattoos, we thought you were someone else."

MLC: They were expecting a big beard or something like that.
N: Or something like that. That goes into the profiling problem specifically in New York. New York has a huge issue with that and law enforcement, specifically with Muslims and Middle Easterners, there is a profile that they look for.

*(*I recently figured it out. Why does a late forties college teacher who doesn't drink or smoke get asked for weed when he goes out to shows? Simple: I bring a backpack in case I buy merch. By that logic nineties' DIY HC fests = full of dealers apparently.)*

Photo: Daragh

MLC: I was surprised when I went down to New York—I hadn't been in about 25 years, right?—and when I went down to see the Death Side shows, I was surprised. We spent most of our time, my wife and I, in Manhattan at a hostel and we were staying with a friend in Brooklyn, in Flatbrush. But I was amazed because I see more visible Muslims in London, Ontario then I saw in New York.
J: It depends on the neighbourhood you're in.

MLC: I was surprised as it just didn't look as diverse as I would have expected for the centre of New York. And I wasn't sure if perhaps there was this lingering chill effect where perhaps people have this inclination to pass or hide their background.
N: Stay out of the way. I think there is this ingrained defense mechanism from post-9/11 for Middle Easterners and Muslims that goes into like staying behind closed doors. You know growing up after 9/11, my parents would tell me, "Hey, don't speak Arabic here, we're about to go here" or "Don't wear this, they might think you're that," you know? There's a shame that came with that. It was very hard for me and it still very hard. Now I mean I don't give a fuck and I do my thing and Haram is just like put it completely out there and kind of throwing it back in their face, you know?

MLC: Was there ever any sort of mea culpa or apology on the part of the people that spearheaded all of this? Like saying, "OK, we got it wrong, our apologies"?
N: No, absolutely not; it's only gotten worse in recent times. It's only gotten worse.

MLC: In terms of their focusing on you, you mean?
N: Oh, on me? No, for me, besides the most recent investigation, which is something I've never had prior. Not really when I'm on the street, nobody really says anything to me. Sometimes I wear the headband on the subway and I get a lot of dirty looks. I got a lot of people thinking… You know, because it's just like they lump it in with what they've seen on TV and on the news, you know? Like, "Oh my God, that looks like…" Many bodegas in New York, specifically in Brooklyn are run by Yemeni people and different people from the Middle East and they'll see my headband and be like, لست ارهابی, which is, "Not a terrorist."

MLC: Oh, I maybe should have asked. Okay.
N: Yeah, that's what it translates to. So they'll be like, "Oh wow." They'll have so much interest—it's usually the younger kids—they'll be like, "Wow, like what does that mean?" Like, "That's crazy. This is what you do?" And then I'll talk to them about the band. They are excited and that's like… Like even yesterday, I don't know if you saw me but I was talking to a man through the gate right next to the venue. There was a Palestinian man and I guess he's in this halfway house here and he was telling me that he fled the war in Palestine about four or five years ago and he came here.

MLC: That's amazing that he could get out at all because I just did not think…
N: Right, especially in Palestine. The airport was bombed by Israeli commandos not too long ago so it's out of commission, so he got out at a very lucky time. But that was such a powerful conversation because he wasn't threatened—a lot of Arabs and Middle Easterners they look at what I'm wearing and what I'm singing about, you know if they get an idea of it and they are extremely apprehensive to even ask me anything. They are just like, "That's haram," which is ironic because that's the name of the band, you know? But it's very blasphemous and that's kind of like the theme here. I don't want to ward anyone away.

MLC: It's like a positive blasphemy. (Laughter)
N: It's positive blasphemy, exactly, you got it. That's really what it is. It's blasphemous for a point, it comes with a point.

MLC: What was very interesting for me because again, I don't get into town and I don't get to see nearly as many shows as I would like these days, but then I've easily seen 15 bands this weekend (Not Dead Yet, 2016)…
N: Yeah, these fests are great for that.

MLC: I mean there were three shows last night and I've been to… this will be my third show today. But one thing that stood out, out of all the shows I've seen this weekend—I haven't seen anybody yet aside from the odd posi-shout out—I haven't seen bands say anything in between songs or have anything even remotely political to say. And of all the bands I've seen, it was your set last night where there was the longest spoken interludes between songs or things continuing after a song as a spoken intro to a song and it was all in Arabic. So it really conveyed that, okay this is really important and this is a large part of what we're trying to express, but it's all in Arabic so there's a bit of a disconnect there in some respects. There is this powerful message there and you can all sort of sense it and feel it but…
N: You can't understand it. Um, I didn't start off doing that. That came on later on when we have these pauses between songs and I did it once and it was like, "That felt very good to just shout something in Arabic." Like I didn't do it on purpose. It wasn't like, "I'm going to think about this, I'm going to start shouting things between songs," but for me it was more so (that) the language itself is demonized. So the purpose just in general without translating anything I'm saying is taking Arabic and making it beautiful again and throwing it in people's faces.
J: Making America Beautiful Again. (Sarcastically)
N: Make America Beautiful Again.

MLC: Make America Great Again, yes.
***(MLC:** This interview was conducted a few weeks before the 2016 presidential election and—in light of the outcome—mention of Donald Trump might seem very conspicuous in its absence. I didn't pursue any line of questioning or jokes relating to Trump because at that time the likelihood of him winning still seemed rather remote. In addition, it would have felt like one of those cheap shots that Canadians often like to take when interacting with people from the US. There can definitely be odd inferiority-masking-as-superiority complexes on the part of many Canadians that shape relations between*

(For anyone who isn't aware and/or looks to Canada as some politically progressive wonderland, my home province of Ontario elected our own version of Trump in the form of Doug Ford in 2018. Trust me when I say that we have no reason to be smug about our elected officials here. Things are also looking absolutely grim on the national level with an election ahead in the fall of 2019.)

the two countries, all of which can get tiring pretty quickly.)
N: No, there is a purpose behind me shouting between the songs.
J: He can't sing.
N: It's more so just like bending the language and throwing it in people's faces. Language and culture that has been demonized and destroyed is now being flipped around and thrown in their face. That's like the concept behind that shouting. (To James) What do you think about that? You've never, no one's ever questioned me really, I've just always done my own thing.
J: the other day I noticed he was drawing out the lyrics of the song to come into the space between songs and I like the idea that you extend the performance between the songs and create like this interstitial thing that runs between, much like you might do when you're writing a song. You might create a Part A and a Part B, and then string them together live. I mean it's good to have that. Also in terms of the messaging of the band, using the language is very much a key aspect of what we do. Also from a musical perspective, I think it's great to have that continuous energy throughout the set. We tried to move through songs quickly as well so hopefully the whole thing is quite an intense, short set.

MLC: Well, it definitely… I felt again despite being ignorant about what was being said specifically, it added a lot of emotional weight to things. And with punk and hardcore there is always this level of passion there and you almost sort of take it for granted that people are on the right side. ***(MLC:*** *True, as punks we can err in being overly generous in our assumptions of how people's stated politics and actions align simply because of their musical taste and subcultural affiliations. But no, scumbags abound everywhere unfortunately.)*
N: Right, right.

MLC: It's interesting because with punk and hardcore you're dealing with unintelligible lyrics a lot of the time so…
N: For me I'm comfortable expressing myself in Arabic. It's the first language I had, so for me to say all those things and English I think it would lose that impact for me personally.

MLC: But also conceptually some things can't really be expressed fully in another language. I mean there are certain concepts—I mean I lived in Germany for a bit, I lived in Japan for a bit—and there are certain things that you just cannot provide a full translation for without something being lost.
N: Right, right, it's just summarized and that's specific to what I do, too.

MLC: And I would find that despite being the same person, my personality differs depending on the language I'm speaking.
N: Oh, really?
J: Interesting.
N: I do feel that way.

MLC: Where when I was speaking in German, I could be a bit of a joker and I felt that I had a better sense of humour for whatever reasons. When I was speaking Japanese, there was a hesitation and a nervousness and whether that came in part due to the culture as well and despite it being me conveying the same thoughts, it's like I find I'm interacting differently with these different (language) vehicles.
N: I can definitely relate to that. In English I think I come off as a goofball, very silly. But in Arabic, I'm very serious. I'm very stern, I'm never really joking around. If I'm talking about anything, it's probably political conversations or whatever.
J: I can definitely empathize with that. I can't express myself in Spanish when I'm around Spanish relatives. Not only am I a different person because of what I'm capable of conveying,

but their understanding of me as a person is different and they would know me as an English speaker so you're different and you're considered differently, too.

MLC: So I'll try to begin to wrap things up. Now you said there is an LP that you're looking ahead to. So short-term and long-term goals for her Haram, what comes next and what would you like to see?
N: For us, we have a bunch of shows coming up now in New York and we have a few fests lined up. After those shows, I think we're really going to try to focus on the LP. It's going to be a very important release for us.
J: We're trying to put it out for the beginning of summer.
N: Yeah, we're shooting for May. I think the demo and the 7" really pave the way for what we're going to release next. I'm hoping it's going to be monumental for us just personally. Um, long-term goals? Um, we just want to keep going, right? I don't think what we're singing about is ever going to stop. I think that after I die, these things are still going to exist in the world and I have to do my part. It's kind of a heavy weight on my shoulders now because I feel like I'm representing a whole community of people. I've met a lot of people on the road, too. You know, just like Arab kids in the scene and they were like, "Hey, we've never really had a voice here. I feel like you guys do this stuff and it's really important to me and it makes me feel like I could finally say hey this band is doing something that I've never seen before and I can relate to it 100%" and that's like a really good feeling, but it's also kind of heavy on me because it gives me a lot of responsibility. But it's something that I'm really courageous about, something I want to continue until I die really. I really have committed myself to this cause.

MLC: Okay, I'm going to ask two more questions because there's one I skipped earlier. I was wondering if there were any precursors that you look to in the punk and hard-core scene, people of Arabic descent that you felt were inspirations in

(As a new parent, I have to say it's amazing how much our 19-month-old baby already comprehends across two languages. Start them young!)

(As this is being printed, the new 2019 Haram 7" is on its way to me through the mail and my expectations are high!)

terms of what you're trying to do here. I guess you could say there are parallels with a band like Los Crudos, for example, reclaiming first language and that space and expanding that space so that other people have to deal with it and not just ignore it. Was there anybody that you could point to that was inspirational in that regard for you?
N: Not specifically Arabic speaking people because I don't think it's been done before really. But specifically, I talked to Nay from La Misma. When I first saw La Misma, it was such an inspirational thing for me. I remember just sitting there in awe watching her sing in Portuguese and I was like, "Wow, wow, if she's brave enough to go up there and sing in a different language…" And not many people understand it, but you see everyone around they're all bobbing their heads just having a good time and just seeing that made me feel like it's doable, you know? It made me feel like, "Hey, if I were to try this thing maybe it could work, maybe people would receive it the right way. I can say that she's literally—I mean she's from so close to home, La Misma's from New York City, specifically from my label and everything. I could really say that La Misma is a huge inspiration on me and they're one of my favourite bands of all time.

MLC: Now there was that book years ago, and it was almost like fiction becoming reality for a short period there, *The Taqwacores* by Michael Knight.
N: Michael Muhammad Knight, yeah.

MLC: And then there was the documentary that followed. Did that have any traction? It seems like there was a lull between that and something like Haram.
N: We could easily be defined as a Taqwacore band. I read *The Taqwacores* maybe a few months into us being a band, but I had a lot of criticisms of it and I don't like being associated with the Taqwacore scene. I think it's very separate from the punk scene.
J: It does feel separate from the punk scene that we are a part of.
N: Yeah, specifically the punk scene that we are a part of.
J: There's a broadness to that, I really love the family of bands in the community of bands that we are a part of. I feel the same way, it's hard to describe what it is.

MLC: I wasn't even sure the extent to which it actually exists anymore. It felt like there was this concept for a novel and…
N: It's been kind of marketed, which is something I don't like.
J: They're not punk bands that you would see touring through the local spots where we go and see punk bands, I mean it's not part of that network.

MLC: So these bands still exist then? I wasn't really aware.
N: I think the biggest Taqwacore band now is the Kominas and they've reached out to me a couple of times about recording a possible split or recording a comp but I wasn't interested. They're all really cool guys, but then again they operate in their own world and they do their own thing. They had a *New York Times* article written about them directly related to Taqwacore itself as a genre and it just rubbed me the wrong way. And also a huge difference is that they are still practicing Muslims. *The Taqwacores* has a few characters that are punks by identity but they are also Muslims by identity. They take what they want from the religion, they still practice it in their own way. And that's something that I like in theory, but I don't identify with it specifically. For me, I'm more of a spiritual person that derives my personality from my experiences growing up as a Muslim, but now rejecting it, you know what I mean? And kind of using what I know to fight… I'm very protective of Islam as a religion. I don't identify as Muslim, but I feel like I learned a lot growing up as a Muslim in this country especially, and I'm very thankful for that. I don't believe in God or anything like that, I lost my faith very early on because I went to Catholic school like I said before. By the time I was nine I was like, "None of this makes sense."

MLC: But if you had started off Catholic that could do it for you, too.
N: Right. I went to Mass. I remember every other Friday we had to go to Mass and it was very awkward for me because my dad would say, "Hey, when you go to Mass, don't kneel, stay seated, don't go up and receive the Eucharist." So right off the bat, it was very awkward and just weird for me.

MLC: My second-to-last time going to confession ever, you just go through these standard things, "Oh, I look at dirty magazines…" Like I would have been in grade 9 or something, and the priest tried to coax me into asking me about masturbation…
N: Ah, red flag.

MLC: … And at that point I had yet to, I was unaware that this option even existed, right?
N: So you learned about it through the father. (Laughing)

MLC: It was extremely uncomfortable.
N: I can imagine.

MLC: And then the other one was when I went back again—because it was mandatory, the school would take us once a month—and I was like, "Well, I don't go to church." (The priest asked) "Well, why don't you go to church?" "Well, you know father, I don't enjoy it, right?" And he was like, "Well, I can't absolve you. You can't be forgiven." So I thought, "Well, this is kind of it for me then." But there are a number of things. Also, I was born in Ireland, my father grew up in Ireland and just the stories he had about…
N: Ah, Irish Catholics specifically, I'm sure.

MLC: …well, yeah, just the abuse he was aware of.
N: Very rampant, especially in that part of the world.

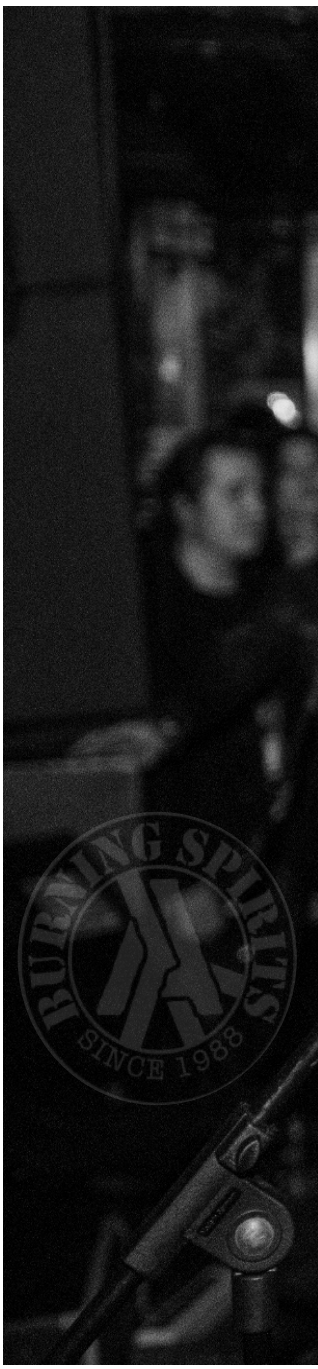
MLC: …and just contrasting the piety with the severity and the barbarity.
N: Right, it's an interesting duality. I've never understood it.

Photo: Mike Thorn

(My mind hurts thinking about how riled up the religious right & InfoWars types became about some absurd Pizzagate conspiracy and their apparent lack of concern for the systematic abuse of children—& accompanying cover up—by the Catholic church. Don't even get me started on subsequent attempts by some to conflate homosexuality with pedophilia. And then shit like the massacre in New Zealand happens and it's just another punch-to-the-heart reminder of how bleak things are. Cheers to people finding ways to resist this dire shit in ways large or small.)

FORWARD

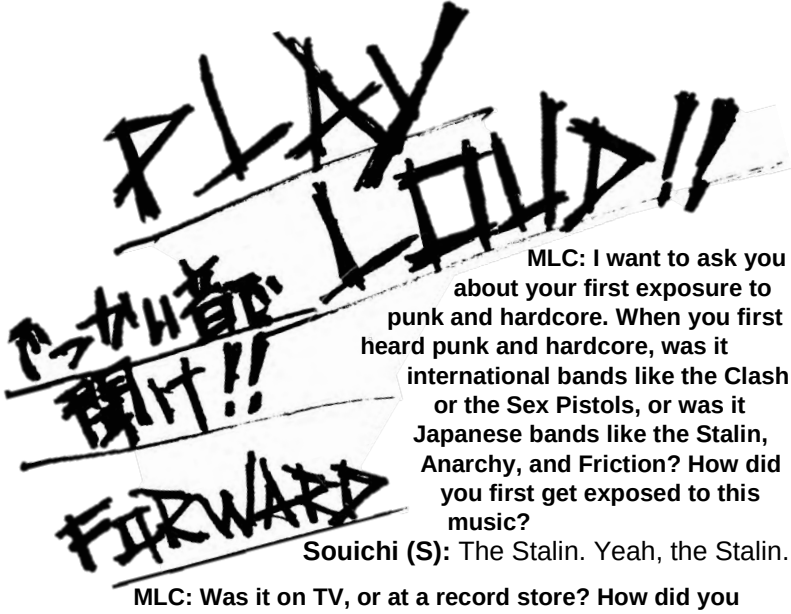
Is it possible for a band to be considered somewhat legendary while remaining frustratingly underappreciated at the same time? If so, I'd argue that Forward from Japan fits the bill. By way of some bizarre punk metric whereby people confuse obscurity with quality, it can feel like the most rarified and overpriced Japanese records get all the hype while solid releases by active bands go relatively unnoticed. In the case of Forward specifically, I think there is an inverse relationship between how prolific and active they are to how top of mind the band is when people talk classic Japanese hardcore. Considering that a decade or more might pass between full lengths from many of their peers, to have a band of HC elder statesmen like Forward recently release two 7"s and one LP in the space of roughly a year is a positively breakneck pace by Japanese standards. As for touring, Forward have logged more serious time and miles on the road than any other Japanese punk band I can think of. True, the well-travelled HC cognoscenti are probably more likely to drop serious $$$ flying out to a one-off reunion appearance than they are to get out to a $15 local show by Forward, but I think the band deserves a lot of credit for not operating exclusively within that fest band niche. What is more, in an era where HC musical trends ebb and flow faster than ever, there's a lot to be said for bands that remain fiercely consistent and deliver the goods time and time again; to say nothing of doing so minus a lot of overblown hype, gimmickery, or any calculated pandering to what's in vogue from one season to the next. On that note, Forward also set themselves apart by being firmly rooted in Japanese hardcore—Ishiya arguably has some of the most instantly recognizable and inimitable vocals in Japanese punk—while often shying away from some of the more obvious musical signposts commonly associated with the form. International bands *trying* to conjure a bit of that magical Japanese hardcore elixir in their sound often resort to an "everything *and* the kitchen sink" approach to their songwriting: Maiden-esque guitar intros, gang vocals, blazing solos, and charging drum breaks—and that's all before you're even halfway through an overly ambitious first track that ultimately leaves your ears feeling more fatigued than impressed. Forward, on the other hand, are often far more measured and restrained in their songwriting yet sound all the more assured and less cluttered as a result. Motorhead? Discharge? Forward? Part of their



power resides in that confidence and moderation in the songwriting department alongside the realization that more isn't always better, nor does it necessarily make for a more memorable song. (To appreciate the range of what Forward do in 2018, contrast the straightforward mid-tempo simplicity of the title track from the *Future Troops* LP with the "Change the Dimension" rager from their *Another Dimension* 7"—two very different approaches to song composition, but both extremely catchy and both undeniably Forward.) As tempting as it might be to look back at a band's legacy as they approach the quarter-century mark, I'd much rather stress that Forward continues to keep pushing and looking ahead—their burning spirits undiminished. In that respect, I think Forward guitarist Souichi's closing comments in this interview pretty much say it all: When I asked what continues to motivate him given all the years and releases he has under his belt, he said he's simply still trying to unlock his own style of playing hardcore punk—a truly noble pursuit! Cheers to Forward: true HC punk lifers who aren't about to quit anytime soon!

(I talked with Souichi from Forward in the spring of 2018 in Tokyo and have probably never had a more enjoyable time doing an interview. Cheers to a true punk lifer!)

Photo: Alex Kress



MLC: I want to ask you about your first exposure to punk and hardcore. When you first heard punk and hardcore, was it international bands like the Clash or the Sex Pistols, or was it Japanese bands like the Stalin, Anarchy, and Friction? How did you first get exposed to this music?

Souichi (S): The Stalin. Yeah, the Stalin.

MLC: Was it on TV, or at a record store? How did you hear about them?
S: The first time? my sempai—you know sempai, right? (**MLC:** *Sempai* is a term used to refer to someone with seniority and more experience in a somewhat hierarchical and deferential relationship, whereas *kohai* refers to the junior in the relationship who aspires to learn from the *sempai* or senior.) One day my sempai told me, he was like, "This is a good one. You should listen to it."

MLC: Which one did you get? Was it *Trash*?
S: *Trash. Trash.*

MLC: Wow. Do you still have it?
S: No, I sold it.

MLC: That's too bad. What did you think when you heard Trash for the first time?
S: It's kind of mind blowing. Actually, I was into the New Wave of British Heavy Metal like Iron Maiden when I was an elementary school student.

MLC: So like Angel Witch?
S: Yeah, Angel Witch, Diamond Head. Because my mom was into it.

MLC: Wow, that's really cool because my parents liked ABBA.
S: "Dancing Queen."

MLC: ABBA, and that was it. So we never had any connection with music at all.
S: So I got a big passion (for music) from her.

MLC: That's amazing. So you're from Shikoku, right?
S: Shikoku, yes.

MLC: Kochi City. Did any of those bands play there?
S: Ah, you know what? Kochi City, it used to be the first place for punk.

MLC: OK, please explain. I thought because it's not Osaka, it's not Tokyo, it's not Fukuoka…
S: Yeah, that's the first place. After I became a punk, we were wearing like the British style, like Dr. Martins, in early 1983 already. Johnson Jacket, may be much earlier. It was almost the same (time) as Tokyo. Also, many bands used to come to Kochi City, especially from Osaka. Like the Mobs—

MLC: I have their first two 7"s. I never knew if I should buy the third one or the 12", I'm not sure.
S: Shikoku is part of western Japan. Shikoku is more like Kansai. I was a big fan of the Mobs. There were a few big bands like the Mobs, and Kuro from Kita Kyushu. We were like, "Mobs is number one!" Everyone was like, "Osaka!"

MLC: Was this because of the music or because of the area?
S: It was because of the area, the area. (Laughter) This was very like, you know, sempai.

MLC: Like territory.
S: Yeah, territory. There's like a hierarchy, sempai, kohai, so I had to follow the hierarchy.

MLC: So Mobs would come and play Kochi? So basically if bands were from Osaka, Kochi City would be one of the first places they'd play?
S: Yeah, and also I've seen G.B.H. in 1985 and Johnny Thunders…

MLC: In Kochi?
S: Yeah, Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers in Kochi. He was touring in Japan, after the tour he passed away.

MLC: I'm going to tell you an embarrassing story. I've never seen G.B.H.
S: You haven't?

MLC: I've had many chances, but I was stupid. One of my first chances to see them would have been in 1988. But at that time in my mind I had already decided that they sucked. I had the first few records and then I thought, "No more." But really, they were still good then. It's very embarrassing, because honestly, they're great, and when you talk about the influence of G.B.H., the way they wrote songs it was like a marriage between punk and Motorhead. Those bands I thought in some ways were very similar. Like I remember when Motorhead *Orgasmatron* came out and there was that song "Ridin' With The Driver." Do you remember that song?
S: Oh, "Ridin' With The Driver," yeah, yeah. (Laughter)

MLC: When I first heard it, I thought, "This sounds like G.B.H." Then when the vocals started I thought, "This sounds like G.B.H. with Lemmy singing! What's happening?" It's just a classic sound and it was very stupid of me to have never seen them.
S: Yeah, classic band.

MLC: So, you went from being interested in the Stalin because of the *Trash* LP. What was the next step between Stalin, the Mobs, and Kuro? Were there any other steps in between?
S: And Discharge of course, the Exploited.

MLC: Oh, yes, Discharge.
S: You know there was a lot of music from the UK in the '80s in Japan. Like Duran Duran, Culture Club…

MLC: Now did you listen to that stuff too?
S: Yes, yes, yes.

MLC: Interesting!
S: Yes, in Japan there was a lot of British culture. You know, clothing, fashion, and music. There were a lot of bands like G.B.H., Discharge, and the Exploited records.

MLC: Also, there were things like those VAP pressings. A lot of the really good UK records would have Japanese pressings with the Obi strips and everything. But I want to clarify something. You were listening to classic Japanese bands and classic UK bands, but were you also following some of the new wave stuff too?
S: Yes, yes.

MLC: What other sort of new wave bands did you like? Because Culture Club and Duran Duran were very popular.
S: I was more into Japanese new wave stuff.

MLC: Please give me some examples.
S: Do you know the Japanese new wave band called the Plastics?

(Re: Japanese new wave bands, the very first Japanese record I bought in my life was Naughty Boys by Yellow Magic Orchestra. I sold it at some point—aka "That's not punk!"—but I wish I hadn't.)

MLC: Were they kind of like a Japanese Devo or something like that? (I was actually thinking of P-Model.) Keyboards?
S: It's like, it sounds like Melt Banana. They were really cool. The Japanese punk scene was born from the new wave scene. Because the new wave scene came to Japan much earlier than punk. So new wave started and then punk started. So old people like us, all of us are also into new wave stuff.

MLC: That's like my transition because I was really into popular new wave bands like Devo, the B-52s, the Boomtown Rats, the Jam, you know? And then I got into punk once I was able to find more punk, but I still love that stuff. Like Kraftwerk, I still love that stuff.
S: Yeah, late '70s to early '80s there was a lot of new wave stuff here. Then some new wave people made the Japanese punk scene. It's kind of interesting.

MLC: Now do you have any interesting examples of people that were in Japanese punk and hardcore bands that maybe had like a secretive new wave band?

Photo: Philip Monahan

S: Secret new wave? (Laughs) Hmmm, chotto muzukashi ne. ("That's a little bit difficult.") I think I'm pretty sure the old people, much older than us, they got a big influence from the new wave stuff.

MLC: So your old band, Insane Youth, was that your first band?
S: No, not actually. I made my first band when I was 15 or 16. That band's name was Bu-Be.

MLC: What was the meaning of the name?
S: I don't know. (Laughter) The singer named that band. That was my first punk band.

MLC: Did you do a tape or anything like that?
S: Ah, no.

MLC: You didn't go to Osaka, right? You were too young.
S: Yeah, too young. So, I had Bu-Be and then the second one was called Doubt, who also didn't release anything. Then Gudon.

MLC: So how old were you then when you moved to Hiroshima?
S: Eighteen. I heard from my friend that Gudon was looking for a new guitar player because Zigyaku…

MLC: The legend!
S: Yeah, he also played in Bastard. He moved to Tokyo in 1988 to take part in Systematic Death. So he was supposed to play in Systematic Death.

MLC: Did that happen?
S: Maybe a couple of shows, I think. I don't know much about that. Then after he quit Systematic Death he started Bastard.

MLC: Wow. But when you went down to Hiroshima for Gudon, did you know those guys or did you just go there and say, "I want to introduce myself" and try to join them?
S: I wrote a letter (starts laughing) to Guy. You know Guy? The bass player of Gudon? Also, he's still running the record label Bloodsucker Records. When I saw him for the first time, when we first met, he was 22. Because he's four years older than me, I was 18 and he was 22…

MLC: So he seemed very old, like an old man. Because when you're young even 16 to 18 seems like such a big difference, so 18 to 22 is a big, big difference. And now I realize 17 to 47 is a small difference. (Laughter)
S: Yeah, but when you're young, it's a big difference. My guitar style, I can tell I've got a big influence from Gudon. And Zigyaku's style, and also Guy, his style, he's very good at playing music.

MLC: Oh, he's amazing! Now I have to ask you two questions. I want to ask about this letter. Talking about the hierarchy and sempai and kohai relationship in Japan, but also you're trying to be punk, so if you write a letter introducing yourself to Gudon, were you trying to be punk or were you also trying to be very respectful? How did that work in Japan? Like in Canada or North America if you're writing a letter and you're a teenager and you're a punk… OK, it's so embarrassing. I remember writing a letter to Chaos UK after I had seen that movie *UK/DK* and I had their address from *Maximum Rocknroll*. It was maybe 1985. I just wrote this stupid letter with skulls and anarchy symbols and things like that. (And a bad cartoon of a punk kicking Maggie Thatcher in the rear.)*
S: That was a good video, good movie.

MLC: I think it was very influential for a lot of people. It was maybe for a lot of people, I mean for me, it was my first exposure to Chaos UK. So what was that letter like? Was it very formal or was it very punk?
S: It was kind of formal. Like, "Hi, my name is Souichi. I'm living in Kochi City. I'm a big fan of you guys and I heard that you are looking for a new guitar player. I'm graduating high

*(*I later caught Chaos UK and Concrete Sox together at a squat show in Germany in 1987. Chaos UK were suitably chaotic and really great fun, while Concrete Sox were somewhat sedate in comparison.)*

school in March," it was January when I wrote the letter, "I'm graduating this March so I can go to Hiroshima around April. I'm not a good guitar player, but I will do my best, because you are a legendary band." (Laughter)

MLC: I wonder if he still has the letter?
S: Maybe Guy he still has it? But I don't think so.

MLC: Here's another question: You mentioned Zigyaku from Bastard. I heard he retired from playing music…
S: Yes, retired.

MLC: …and then I heard he was playing pachinko* full-time.
S: Yes, yes.

MLC: Is that still what he's doing? Do you know what he's doing now?
S: OK, this is very personal stuff. Yeah, he's into not only pachinko but also stocks. He's a very smart guy. He graduated from University in Hiroshima, which is a high-level education.

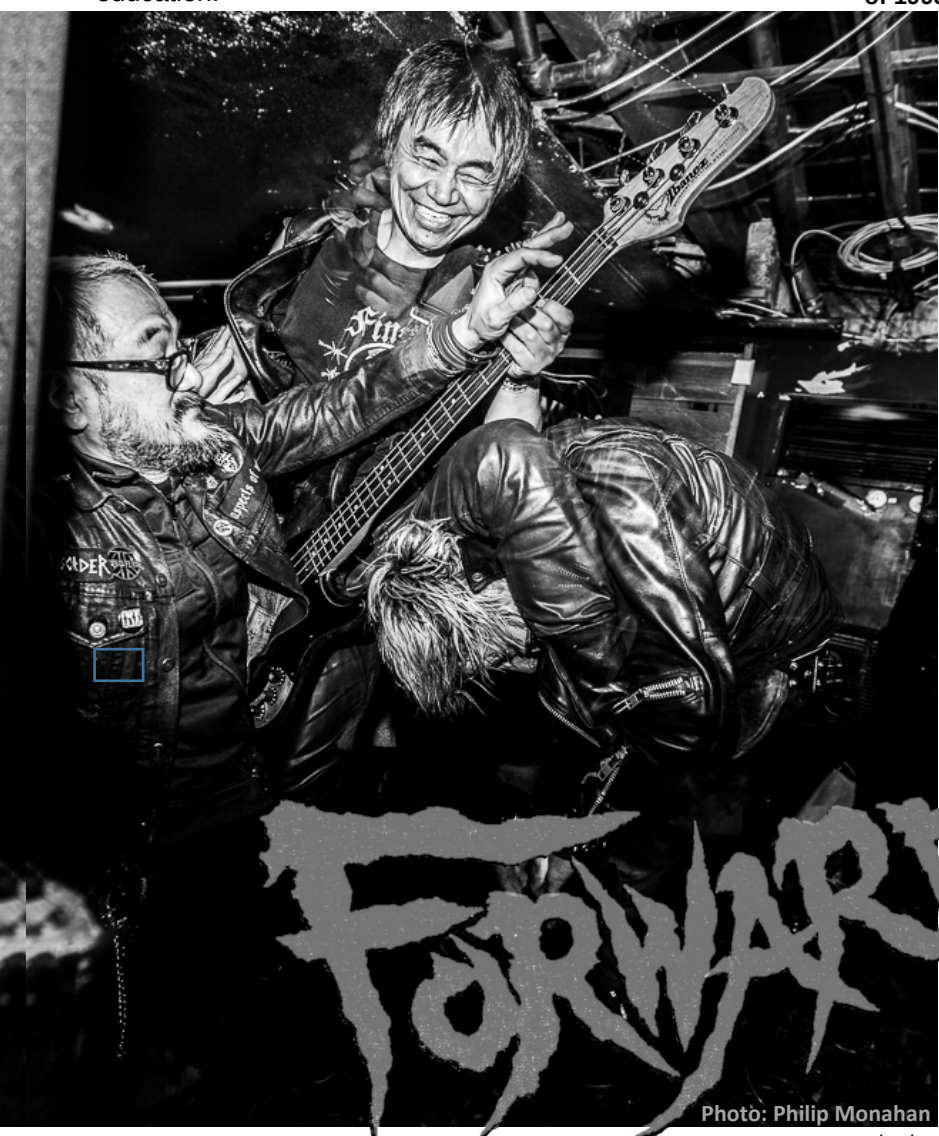


Photo: Philip Monahan

MLC: Wow, what did he study?
S: I don't know his major, but he studied in Shudo Daigaku (University) in Hiroshima.

MLC: It's like a top-level school?
S: Top level. He smart; he's good at it. One day I drank with him and talked about life, daily life. And he's really working hard doing pachinko and stocks. He can make enough money to feed his family.

MLC: That's very, very interesting. How long were you in Gudon?
S: A couple of years. And then one day Gudon broke up because Guy and the singer, Happy San, they were not getting along. One day they were fighting, so then I thought, "What should I do?" Guy told me, "I will make a new band" so we can get together again. The band was called Warhead Junk. (That was) right after.

MLC: Was anybody angry about the name? Because the name is very close.
S: There is a funny story. Warhead, they're from Kyoto, when they started to play in the early years of Warhead, they used to go to Hiroshima very often. So many people thought, "Warhead Junk? Warhead? They're from Hiroshima."

MLC: Well, it's funny because when I first moved to Japan, Warhead and Forward was maybe one of the first shows I saw here at Yokohama F.A.D. I think it was in October or November of 1998. So how long did Warhead Junk last?
S: I think Warhead Junk was maybe four years, but I left the band.

MLC: I was wondering because that was the same time as Insane Youth.
S: I left the band because I was thinking in Hiroshima there is a big punk scene, but in my hometown in Kochi City there was no scene. Around the early '80s there was a punk scene, they had the Sexual, they are from Kochi City.

MLC: I have their 7" flexi. What were they like live?
S: I used to go to see them. I am a kohai of the Sexual. They were good and they were good guys. You know they are much older than me. You know, they're a little bit (makes a bit of a tough guy pose).

MLC: A little bit scary.
S: They were really scary. Then you know, after the Sexual, there was no punk scene. So then I thought, I was playing in Warhead Junk, one day it came into my mind, I thought I needed to go back to Kochi and make a punk scene. That's why I left the band. That's kind of very embarrassing because Shikoku, there was no punk scene.

MLC: So how did you get Insane Youth started then?
S: I had a friend in Kochi City, I was the elder one, and I wanted to make a punk scene in Kochi City. And I told my friend, my old friend, " You are on bass." (Laughter)

MLC: He had no choice.
S: No choice. (Laughter)

MLC: I wish I could do that in my city.
S: It was an old friend, they are very understanding. I went back to my hometown Kochi City in 1991. I started Insane Youth. One day I saw a guy with blond hair wearing a leather jacket.

MLC: Was this Kawakami?
S: Kawakami, yes.

MLC: Was that the second Disclose release, the split with Insane Youth?
S: Yes, yes.

*(*A pachinko machine is like cross between a vertical pinball game and a slot machine. Although gambling is officially illegal in Japan, by inventively sidestepping some legal technicalities, pachinko parlours can be found everywhere in the country and generate more gambling revenue than Las Vegas, Macau, and Singapore combined.)*

MLC: Do you have any interesting stories you can share about Kawakami?
S: Yes, of course, there's a lot. Actually Kawakami was living in the suburbs of Kochi City. His town was really in the country. I was like, "Hey, are you a punk?" He was like, "Yes, I'm playing in my town," this very kind of countryside town.

MLC: Was this Disclose already?
S: He used to have a band called Dehumanization.

MLC: Ah, like from Crucifix.
S: I was like, "Are you a big fan of Crucifix?" Dehumanization used to have a singer. The singer left the band, then Disclose started without the singer so Kawakami took over the vocals.

MLC: What was the age difference between you and Kawakami?
S: Two years, but two years when you are young is very big. So I was like the sempai.

MLC: But also you had been in Hiroshima and been in these other bands.
S: Actually he wasn't good at playing guitar, at making sounds, when I met him the first time. So he was asking me how to get the right guitar sound. So I gave him a distortion pedal, it was Zigyaku's pedal.

MLC: Oh wow!
S: That was a good one. It was a distortion pedal with an equalizer all together. I think he recorded the first Disclose album with that pedal.

MLC: The first EP, Once the War Started, or the first LP?
S: Ah, I'm not sure.

MLC: Sorry, these are very nerdy questions.
S: Also, he didn't know how to make a sound with a Marshall amp. So at every show, I set up his amp. It's very funny. (Laughter) (**MLC:** See the Gasmask Terror interview in this issue for my description of seeing Disclose and Kawakami's sound.) He was a big fan of the Swedish sound. He often wrote letters (to people in Sweden).

MLC: I think he was a world-famous pen pal. What did other punks in Japan think about Disclose when the band was starting out? Because again, their sound was borrowing very much from Discharge of course, but also the Swedish influences. Did it seem very different from what other bands were doing at that time? Did anybody think that they were maybe just a joke or did people take them seriously?
S: I think people took them seriously. You know, in the Japanese hardcore scene, you used to have the Japanese crust hardcore scene and the Japanese hardcore scene, but they are now getting together. In the early nineties, Disclose was one of the bands from the crusty scene. Also, Japanese crusty bands are really into hardcore bands from overseas. I think not only Disclose, but you know that band Life? They also got a big influence from the Chaos UK style. When people saw Disclose, some people thought, "That band is a copycat."

MLC: That's what I was maybe wondering, if people didn't take them as seriously because their influences were so obvious. I mean now they are legendary, but much of the legend came after of course.
S: I still remember many people talking shit about Disclose because, "Ah they are just a Discharge copy."

MLC: Let me ask, why did Insane Youth break up?
S: Because one day in 1996 Ishiya and You, the bass player of Death Side… I knew Death Side broke up.

MLC: Did you write another letter? "Dear Ishiya Sempai…"
S: Ah, no. (Laughter) They came to Kochi because they wanted to have a new band. I didn't understand because, why me? Because in Tokyo there's a lot of people, there's a lot of good guitar players and good drummers, so I thought, "Why me?" I've been thinking about that because I used to have a girlfriend and I was 26 years old already. It was almost too old to get to Tokyo to live, so I was hesitating. So the drummer Doi, he was, "Oh yeah, I'm down! I'm down! Ishiya San, I'm down!" I was hesitating because I started Insane Youth. I wanted to keep playing with Insane Youth, but Doi was like, "I'm down!" So I was, "OK, OK, you can do it, you can do it. I will keep playing in Insane Youth." So Doi, Ishiya, and You kept saying, "Come, come, come." Finally, I said, "OK, OK."

MLC: It must have been very interesting when Forward started because Death Side were such a legendary band. There was all this history, there was Insane Youth, Gudon, Warhead Junk, Systematic Death, Death Side, you know, all of these members coming from very famous bands. And then the name of the new band is Forward. Now I'm just guessing here, but was the idea for the new band just to do something different and keep moving forward together in a new way? What was the idea for the band when the band started?
S: Death Side is a very legendary band. I was thinking maybe many people would talk shit about a new band like Forward.

MLC: They're like, "He's not Chelsea!" (Death Side guitarist)
S: Yeah, like, "He's not good at guitar!"

MLC: It's like being the new guy in Metallica. (Laughter)
S: But Ishiya wanted to make Forward more like a punk rock style at first because Chelsea and Ishiya weren't getting along together. So Ishiya was very tired of Chelsea's style. Sometimes when you get tired of the style you get into kind of the opposite stuff. Ishiya was very tired of Chelsea's style, so he wanted to make totally different stuff.

MLC: Well, the tempos and speed are different, the feeling is different, and it has more of— how do I say it?—It's not really more rock'n'roll and not a swing, but it has more of a Motorhead kind of feel as opposed to strictly hardcore kind of feel. Who chose the name Forward? Was there a special meaning behind that?
S: Ishiya. Yeah, yeah. He took the name Forward from rugby. He used to be a rugby player when he was in high school. He got kicked out of high school. I mean, he quit. But that's why he picked the name Forward.

MLC: I'm going to change the topic here a little bit. I know you wash windows on high rise buildings, but what about the other guys in Forward? How old are they and what do they do?

(Since Bastard get a couple of mentions in this issue, I have to say their reunion show in Tokyo circa 2000 was easily one of the best sets that I saw during my time in Japan.)

FORWARD

S: OK, You, he's taking care of old people, handicapped people, that kind of stuff.

MLC: Like a personal support worker. And he's 51 you said.
S: Yes, 51. Ishiya, he…

MLC: He will be like the next customer soon. Sorry! (Laughter)
S: Now he's writing some articles related to punk rock stuff. So he's very kind of famous within the punk rock hardcore scene in Japan. He's writing articles about old Japanese stuff. After *Doll* magazine finished, there are two fanzines now. Half of the people from *Doll* made a new magazine called *Bollocks*, and there is *EL Zine*. He's writing for *Bollocks*. I was writing articles in *EL Zine. EL Zine* is more like a crust style. *Bollocks* is more like '70s Japanese punk, Laughin' Nose stuff.

MLC: And Ishiya has a young boy now. How old is his son?
S: He's six. He's going to be 51 soon.

MLC: (Doing the math) So he was younger than me when he had his baby. Oh no! The guy from Boy Records, Satoru, when I told him I was having a baby he started laughing. He said the guy from *Doll* magazine (Miki Moriwaki) had a baby very late with Beck San from Record Boy. He said, "You're going to be an old Pa Pa like the guy from *Doll* magazine!" But, ah, *shoganai ne*. ("It can't be helped.")
S: Shoganai.

MLC: What does Ishiya's father think about what he does and the decisions that he made in his life?
S: I don't know. Ishiya…

MLC: Well, because of the grandson, do they have a good relationship?
S: Yes, good relationship. A long time ago he was saying, "I don't have a father. I don't have a mother." (Laughter) He was like pretending. Now they are getting along together.

MLC: Ah, nice. How old is Akiyama and what does he do?
S: Akiyama is my age, 48. He used to play in a Japanese hardcore band, the Rustler, in Shizuoka Ken. Then he, after the Rustler, he was more into rock'n'roll stuff. He used to play in two more Japanese rock'n'roll bands called Who the Fools and Blues Binbos. Before Forward, he was more into rock'n'roll style than hardcore. He does kind of construction stuff for work. His girlfriend is 29 years old, a young woman, she's very rich. He hates working. He works only a couple of days a week, but that's okay.

MLC: Lucky man. So with Forward, the first EP was on Bloodsucker Records and then you had records on HG Fact. But also you guys were very unusual for a Japanese band because some Japanese bands were very worried about working with international labels. But you have had records on Hardcore Victim, Prank, Partners in Crime, 540, Ugly Pop, and maybe more now. So why did you guys work with so many international labels?
S: I think that's because I would like to do that. My band, I maybe want everyone to get to know my band overseas. I feel very proud to be on these labels overseas because not many Asian bands have done releases like that on overseas labels. I left Forward once in 1999 because my father passed away. I had to take care of my mother and my family. Then when I came back to Forward, I was thinking that I want to do some new stuff like going on tour overseas. Maybe 10 years ago the Japanese hardcore scene was still mysterious, you know?

MLC: It's also unusual because some Japanese bands when they tour it's like your Vancouver vacation (that we talked about earlier), like three days.
S: Yeah, three days. (Laughter)

MLC: But Forward is one of the few Japanese bands—I mean, you went to America four times?
S: Yeah, four times.

MLC: And long tours. And you went to Europe once.
S: Yes, Sweden and Finland.

MLC: That is very, very unusual for a Japanese band. But that takes a lot of dedication and also with your jobs and things it can't be easy, right?
S: Fortunately the company I work at is very understanding so we can keep doing it.

MLC: Now your experiences working with these other labels, were there any highlights or bad points you'd like to talk about? I mean, did you ever have any problems working with overseas labels?
S: No, never, never. In 2004, it was the first US tour for Forward. We had a 40 day tour. And Simon from Ugly Pop organized the shows, but he never came to the venue.

MLC: I thought he met you guys in Portland or something?
S: Yeah, the last part of the tour. So there was no organizer with us, there was only four people in Forward—ah, there was another guitar player—so there was four people who had never been to the US and didn't know any English. It was their first time to be in the US and to be in the real world. I worked hard. I was like the tour manager.

MLC: And maybe the babysitter.
S: Yeah, like babysitting. They got a bit of culture shock. They were talking shit, like, "Fuck America, fuck America." They didn't know anything about the real world.

MLC: Did they enjoy that first tour?
S: Actually, the first time they didn't enjoy it. They said, "No more, no more, no more." I was very sad. Sometimes misunderstandings happened and I had to explain and explain and explain things.

MLC: You were the person in the middle.
S: Yeah, in the middle. It was very stressful. But you know I've got many friends overseas, I've got many friends from that tour. I talked a lot, so that was good for me making many friends.

MLC: But Forward went back to the US three more times. For the second tour, did they want to go back and were they ready to go back? Or did you really have to say, "Please, let's go back"?
S: You know, after the tour I was getting in touch with friends through MySpace. I was telling the other guys how it can be a better experience if you go back to the USA. That's what I

(I'd considered having a section of the zine devoted to the topic of punk parenting. How people navigate their different/overlapping identities could certainly be an interesting area to explore, but my first attempt at an interview fell through. In the case of another interview that did happen, there wasn't much said that proved interesting or insightful enough to really merit printing. ∴ MLCERAHC # 2 = Punk's not dead edition.)

was telling them and it worked.

MLC: So the second time, did they enjoy it?
S: Yes, they enjoyed it. They realized it was just culture shock and cultural differences.

MLC: It's not easy. It's great if they can go and have fun because it's very different from Japan.
S: Very different.

MLC: Some things are worse some things are maybe better, but it's very different. You talked a little bit about crust bands in Japan. Say if you had a band like Disclose or Gloom or Acid, and then you had Burning Spirits style bands; that seems like a different kind of scene almost.
S: Different.

MLC: And then there are younger bands that played together, and then there are older bands that only seem to play with other older bands. But Forward seems like a band where you play with a mix of a lot of different bands.
S: Yes.

MLC: And I was talking with Andy Dempz from Michigan and he was saying that in the Crust War book *Inferno Punks* that you are the only Burning Spirits guy in that book.
S: Yeah. (Laughter)

MLC: So do you feel like Forward has an open policy for the bands you play with?
S: Often. When I saw that I was in that zine, I felt like kind of awkward.

MLC: Really? Why? Was that embarrassing or something?
S: Yeah, that's okay though. (Laughter) It's, you know, Burning Spirits is very different, different from the crusties. Burning Spirits people didn't like crusty people, and crusty people hated Burning Spirits people.

MLC: I was wondering. So still?
S: Not anymore. Used to be. I worked very hard to make the scene get together. I get along with the young crusties since over 10 years ago. I'm always telling Burning Spirits people about crusties that we might be playing different music, but that hardcore punk has the same heart.

MLC: Oh, and many of the same early influences too, right?
S: Yeah, right, right, right.

MLC: If you think about Chaos UK or Disorder and Doom, some of it's coming from the same place, right?
S: Same, same. I used to tell the Burning Spirits people to get together, and I was also telling young crusty people to get together. It's a small change, but I really respect myself for trying to do that. (Laughter) Now we are getting together.

MLC: Because it seemed like depending on the city and depending on the style, it seemed very separate for a while.
S: Separate, separate.

MLC: But also an interesting thing about Japan, if I compare Japan and North America, many people they leave punk and hardcore after only a few years. And then a new group of younger people comes, and then they change, and then there's a new group. For example, when I first lived in Japan I could go back to Toronto and in three years at shows there were a lot of new faces, and three years after that, there were *a lot* of new people. And some people, I would just never see them again. But when I go to a show in Japan, I'm 47, and I don't feel like an old guy because there's lots of people older than me.
S: Yeah, a lot of people, a lot of people still.

MLC: Yeah, at some shows in Japan I could feel like a young guy, right? I think that's wonderful about Japan, because people don't quit very early. Or some people stay with it for a very long time. But when I go to shows here, I don't see young people. I don't see teenagers, I don't see people in their early 20s.
S: Yeah, maybe.

MLC: So why do you think there so few young, young people at shows?
S: I think you know, almost all Japanese young people are more into rap music. Almost all of them are into rap music. Maybe there's only a few people into hardcore and doing band stuff.

MLC: Interesting. I was wondering if many, many years ago, stories about traditional Japanese hardcore bands, like a (band name omitted) show could be very scary or maybe a Lip Cream show could be very scary. Do you think at some point for young people it maybe seemed too frightening to become a part of it? Or even if you think about the sempai kohai relationship, do you think that made it difficult for younger people, too?
S: I think so, I think so. You know, the crusty people are saying we are equal, in the crusty scene things are getting better. No hierarchy. But in the Burning Spirits traditional stuff, there are many old people. (Laughter) They care about the hierarchy still.

(Yes, it's weird that a style of music with such an inherently anti-authoritarian bent can be so beholden to hierarchy and tradition in Japan, but in some respects a strong case could be made that punk in North America is not so different.)

MLC: OK, but even traditionally people think about punk and anarchy and breaking the rules, but in Japan what about something like keigo? (Keigo is old style honorific style of speaking Japanese that demonstrates more respect to people who are considered your elder or superior.) So if a young person wants to speak to a Burning Spirits sempai, do they have to use keigo?
S: Yeah, yeah.

MLC: Wow. And if they don't use keigo, what happens?
S: Maybe, "Who the fuck are you talking to?" It's difficult, difficult.

MLC: You know it's funny because we're talking about a group of people who made very untraditional decisions: not traditional jobs, not traditional choices, but then some things are still very traditional.
S: Yeah, that means it shows respect. Yeah, that's the traditional style.

MLC: I also wonder that in Toronto it looks very young to my eyes, which is wonderful, right? But I wonder if in Japan it's because of phones and computers. People just do things like play games and if they want to watch a movie, they just do it on their phone. If they want to listen to music, they can just do everything on their phone.
S: Yeah, they do.

MLC: Because in Japan with punk and hardcore, I think of it very much as a live music culture. You know like some bands maybe they release a 7", or maybe they release a record, and then there's no new record for like six years, you know? But the band still plays shows and the band still does things whereas the pace can be very different for other bands. Now you guys, you've been to North America several times, you've been to Europe, and you've played all over Japan…
S: And also Australia with Teargas.

Photo: Daragh

MLC: So, seeing punk scenes in other parts of the world was there anything that you wanted to take back to Japan and change the way you do things here? Or was there something that if you play a show in North America, that you wish could be done more the Japanese way for example?
S: Yeah, actually the reason I keep in touch with the punks overseas and to play together is I want things to be mixed. Japanese and American hardcore, there's traditional stuff in both countries, but it's like it comes from the same brain. There's a lot of misunderstandings still between the scenes, so I want to, I don't how to say it. "We are punks. Come on, get together!" I want to bring things closer, make them connected. There are many young crusties who are inviting US bands and overseas bands to Japan, it's not like it used to be, "Ah, gaijin san, gaijin san," still. (**MLC:** *Gaijin*, meaning a person from overseas, is a term commonly used to refer to foreigners in Japan.) We are all human, people aren't at different levels. I don't want it. My goal is to see punks on both sides getting together and getting to know each other.

MLC: I guess to be more specific, my question is, when I go to a show in Japan, it's so organized. Like the doors open at 6 PM, the first band plays from 6:30 to 6:50, and they have the same backline so the next band starts 15 minutes later, and they play for 25 minutes, and the next band uses the same backline, and so on. And then the show is finished by 9:30 or 10 PM at the latest. But in North America sometimes the show doesn't start until 10 PM or 10:30 PM and bands don't share equipment a lot of the time. What do you think are some of the strengths and weaknesses when you compare how things are done in the two countries? Is it frustrating sometimes when you go to North America and see how disorganized it is?
S: I like it that way, yeah. Because I'm kind of a night person. (Laughter) I guess it depends on the person though. In Japan, almost all shows start earlier because the earlier shows are good for people who live in the suburbs so they don't miss the last train. And also the sun goes down earlier in Japan. (**MLC:** There is no daylight saving time in Japan.)

MLC: So when you go to North America, it doesn't bother you guys if things are maybe less organized? You can be kind of relaxed about it?
S: Ah yes. For me, no problem, no problem.

MLC: Interesting, because I thought that would maybe be a big difference and a challenge in some ways. But one thing that's very interesting to me about Forward, when I talked to you during your last tour, you sent me your set lists. How many shows did you play on that tour?
S: About 20 shows.

MLC: But when I looked at your set lists, every night things changed. Many bands when they go on tour, they might play the same 18 songs every night. But you guys, there were only a few songs that you played every night, and sometimes there were songs that you only played once or twice on the entire tour. Every night it changed.
S: Yeah, that's maybe a big difference (between us and other bands). I think the same set list, playing the same set list every day is much easier. I like it, but I still don't understand why everyone wants to do a different set list every night.

MLC: Oh, so it's the other guys in the band who want to change it?
S: Yeah, they want to change it. I guess this is also traditionally Japanese. I would like to get along with people, I'm easygoing, so I make it easier. I still don't understand why we are doing it that way.

MLC: For some bands that would be a big discussion. Everyone would have to get together and decide.

(I love gigs that start and finish early. Punk time does not exist in Japan.)

S: Yeah, that's kind of a waste of time I think, but that's just my opinion though. I don't know, maybe they don't want to play the same thing all the time.

MLC: Well, it makes it much more challenging for the band. But also around the time of that last North American tour, I forget if it was before or after, in Japan you played a show that was only Forward. How many songs did you play?
S: 40. (Laughter)

MLC: How was that? How did you feel at the end?
S: I remember after playing 20 songs I was almost dying. And then after, I was like genki, genki, genki, (good spirit, good energy) the feeling was getting higher.

MLC: Because that's almost like being an athlete. With sports you get very tired and then you get your energy back.
S: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MLC: A Forward only show, have you only done that one time?
S: Two times. We are planning on doing it again before the North American tour, maybe around October.

MLC: North American bands don't play 40 songs. I mean some bands only play for 15 minutes, so it's very, very different. Now you mentioned some of the different jobs that people do in Forward. And I noticed that in Japan, a lot of punks work in construction and do those kinds of jobs. But in North America, it's not uncommon to have punks—it's not completely rare—sometimes you have punks like me for example, who become teachers or sometimes lawyers. And in Canada there are even a few punks who are now politicians; people who were maybe punks back in the '70s and stuff. In Japan would be very unusual for someone to have a background in punk and be a teacher or a politician or a lawyer?
S: (Pause) Okay, I think old punks, maybe 10 years older than me, they were highly educated. Almost all of them graduated from university. Like Minoru from Lip Cream, he graduated from university. My age, people aren't highly educated. Maybe people only graduated from junior high. In the 1980s, people were pretending to be juvenile delinquents, bad boys. It was really common. Some of them quit school to look strong, so that's why many people our age are doing construction stuff to make money to keep doing their bands. But young people, the crusty people, they are also almost all highly educated. Almost all of them graduated from Meiji Daigaku and are doing white-collar work.

MLC: Is that accepted then? That you can do your professional work and still be involved in the punk scene?
S: No problem, no problem.

MLC: It's funny because when you are maybe 15 or 16 and you think you're being a really tough punk, but you're only 16, so you not really tough, right? (Laughter)
S: You know like Yankii culture?

MLC: Well, that's also like a juvenile delinquent type culture.
S: Yes, yes. Yankii culture used to be more common in '98. That's why all the Japanese punks who spent their time around maybe 1985, they still have a big influence.

MLC: But it's also very strange too, because for many years the Japanese scene for people seemed very mysterious. It was hard to have communication with Japanese bands, not many Japanese bands made it overseas, there were very few examples. And unless you were buying records from Pushead through Pusmort, it maybe was harder to find many Japanese releases. But do the Japanese punks ever think some of the attention from overseas is weird? Sometimes I'll meet people from North America, and they'll know things about Japanese bands that may be even people in Japan don't know. It seems like they know everything, or I've seen record collectors and people that are really into Japanese bands, they'll be wearing shirts from bands like Hog Gish, for example.
S: Hog Gish. (Laughter)

MLC: You know, they had like one flexi. Or I'll see people wearing shirts for a band like State Children and they had one flexi. And people are paying so much money for these records.
S: Nerds! (Laughter)

MLC: Does that seem strange being from Japan? Like if I lived in Japan, I could see Lip Cream are very important or Death Side are very important, but there are these really obsessive, obsessive people for bands like State Children or Hog Gish? Are those considered important bands in Japan, too?
S: No problem. It depends, I think. I don't know. I think, *daijobu*, no problem.

MLC: You have a long history in punk and hardcore and you talked about when you first got exposed to bands like the Stalin and everything that happened after that. And you've done a lot of touring and it's been like 32 years of playing in bands. Have your ideas about punk and what punk means to you changed over the years? Or how have they changed?
S: When I started to play in a band, a punk band, I was thinking I was maybe going to die maybe before I turn 20. Live fast die young, you know? But after 20, when I turned 20 years old, it was more like a lot of pretending like we are tough guys and tough guys are really cool. That's what

Photo: Philip Monahan

(One of the best comments I saw on the topic of Japanese collectable records in the past year accompanied an Instagram pic of the last Warhead LP with the caption, "Rages harder than a shelf of expensive, obscure flexis. #japanesehardcore" If it's a choice between owning one OG first Execute flexi or the entire discographies from Forward, Death Side, Gauze, Warhead, Nightmare, and Disclose combined, I know what I'd pick!)

everyone was thinking.

MLC: Was the scene actually violent or was it more like people pretending and acting tough?
S: It was violent and also many people were pretending that they are tough guys.

MLC: But were there real fights at shows?
S: Yes, sometimes it happened, sometimes it happened. People were more very intense. Looking back on the past, it was very crazy though. Now sometimes I look back on the past and that was crazy.

MLC: For me when I think about violent things I saw at shows in the '80s sometimes, now it makes no sense to me. Now I just think why? Why? You know when you are younger it was about being tough, like in your 20s…
S: But I'm not interested in that now, not anymore. Yeah, I still remember I was like a big child when I was 20, I was like a big child still. The meaning of punk for me was after I turned 30, that means making peace. (Laughter) Like grown-up. I'm not political, I'm not a guy who's into political correctness. That's a good idea, but I'm not a guy who is pushy with other people. Punk for me is only a tool to make people equal. That means I've gotten old. (Laughter) I think Japan is not yet civilized; some parts of the culture and people. It looks very civilized, but guys are still using their wives and girlfriends like a slave still. I don't like that part of Japanese culture.

MLC: And this is one reason I hear that many young women don't want to get married. They think, why would I want to do that? Or even I've heard stories about men when they retire and they come home and finally spend time with their wife and then they get a divorce, because for the first time they have to spend time together and it's very, very difficult.
S: (Laughter) Japanese people are very polite, everyone says that, and Japanese people are also very polite with sempai/kohai. But Japanese society is made of groups, Japanese people like to make groups. They are afraid of getting kicked out. So living here, the most important thing is getting along and how we get along in the group more than individuality. That's one of the things that makes me think living here is not civilized yet.

MLC: I remember even hearing things about things like koen mamas, park mamas and different parks. So maybe some mothers can't go to certain parks with their children because there is a group of park mothers there that control the park.
S: Yeah, that's true, that's true.

MLC: That's very, very different.
S: Yeah, I don't like it.

MLC: You were talking about being younger and wanting to be a tough guy. I'm noticing someone like Ishiya now; I'm sure that many years ago he was a very scary guy.
S: Yes, yeah.

MLC: But now in between songs he's almost like a comedian, so I think the atmosphere around that has really changed.
S: Yeah, since he had the baby, that really changed him, I think. Also, I think touring North America and Australia and seeing the real world, I think that made him change, which is good.

MLC: I remember years ago when I first came to Japan and I would want to take pictures at a Forward show. And people would say, "No, don't take pictures at a Forward show."
S: (Laughter)

MLC: It was like, "Don't take photos of the bands and don't talk to the bands."
S: (More laughter)

MLC: But I think after you go to North America a few times then all those ideas maybe change.
S: Yeah, they changed, yeah. The Japanese hardcore scene used to be a very closed society, very closed.

MLC: You guys have been doing the band for a long, long time. You've been releasing records since '97 or '98, what are some ways you think the band is still improving or can still improve?
S: This is my opinion though. Many so-called old bands are getting more slow year after year. Some bands are more into rock'n'roll stuff, no more hardcore, but I want to do the same thing, go more forward. (Laughter) I'm always looking for a new way to make new songs, and I still have big motivation to make songs, so I want people to get to know my style. Year after year, year after year I want to get more active. Like I'm getting older…

MLC: So as you get older is it getting more important to you doing the band?
S: I never think about that like that. Either way, I know we will die maybe 30 years later or maybe 20 years later.

MLC: Well, the band it's been 22 years now.
S: Yeah, 22 years.

MLC: Do you guys ever think about things like your 25th anniversary? Is there something special you guys will try to do on your 25th anniversary?

(I have to say it's very refreshing to hear an older punk reflect on how their perspective on the scene evolved over the years and not romanticize any danger or violence that might have been present at some shows in the past. I had no time or patience for violence at shows then and even less so now. Staying out past my bedtime and standing around for bands while wearing shitty footwear is more than enough physical risk for me these days.)

S: Yeah, we were thinking about that, but we haven't decided yet.

MLC: You could do like a live DVD. Like Motorhead did *The Birthday Party* live recording after 10 years and then they did another one and then another one and then another one. (Laughter)
S: Maybe we will release some stuff I think. I want to be more active year after year. My songs make me more active. When I make songs, it makes me want to be more active, like self-motivation. (Laughter)

MLC: (Moaning about not being in a band…) The last band I was in that really toured broke up in 1991 so that was already a long time ago.
S: Yeah, a long time ago.

MLC: Do you have a new Forward LP planned? Is that something you are starting to work on?
S: Yes, we are planning on releasing a new album before the North American tour. We are working on it right now and we have five songs already and we will do five more songs. It will be released on 540. (**MLC:** This was the Future Troops LP that came out in fall 2018.)

MLC: Oh, again. That last one on 540, *Against Their Insanity*, I thought it was awesome. And it's easy sometimes when a band just keeps releasing records to just take that band for granted. It's like, "Oh, another record." You could do that like with G.B.H., "Oh, another record. I have the first four; I don't need to buy a new one," right? But I get very inspired if I see bands still working is still being creative and still producing something good. Like in North America, a lot of bands might have a demo, and then a 7", and then a record, and then they're done. They don't have anything else to do after that, they break up. So I love that you guys are still doing it.
S: Yeah, doing it is really part of our lifestyle.

MLC: Is there anything you can say about how the new record will be different or what you want to bring to the new record?
S: I think the new stuff is very different from the last one. It's more metal.

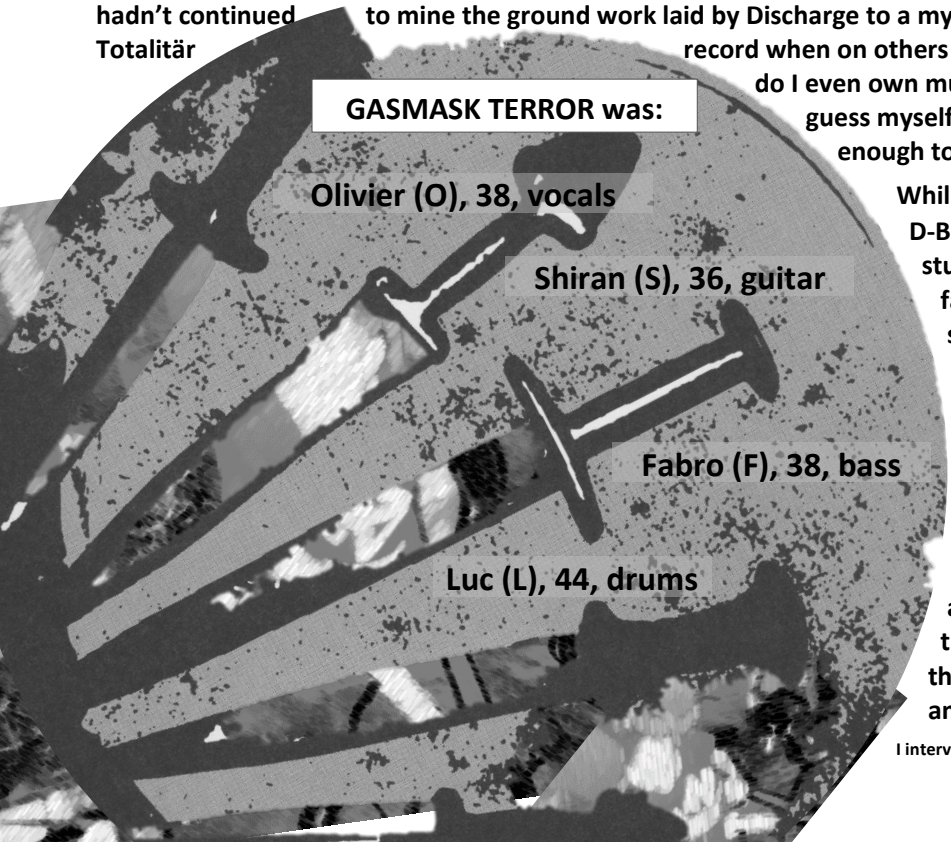
MLC: OK, but what kind of metal? NWOBHM?
S: No, it's like thrash metal. Yeah, that's my taste. But also we have songs that sound like Disorder and Chaos UK style and also Japanese traditional style. So it's maybe different. I can say that our songs are getting harder, much harder.

MLC: But aside from Forward, you are also active in these international projects like Smash Detox with the guitarist from World Burns to Death. And this year you're also doing leads on the new Butcher (Texas) record. Can you talk a little bit about your involvement with Butcher? You said that you might do a little bit of touring with Butcher?
S: I'm really looking forward to going on tour with them if the time is right. I think there are maybe very few Japanese people who can do that, so I want to get more experience still. I may be like an old guy, but (I have) passion still. I want to know more about new worlds and to get that experience.

MLC: I talked to you a little bit about this before the start of the interview, about the first Butcher LP. Some people I talked with in North America didn't like it because they thought it sounded too Japanese. They seem to say, "This is a band from America, they shouldn't try to sound Japanese." What do you think about that?
S: I think it happens also in Japan, because a lot of crusty punks sound just like American hardcore bands. In Japan there's a lot of bands who sound like the Swedish style, but I think that's okay though. As for Butcher, I understand why people make that argument; I understand that. This is my opinion, but I don't like that way. Because American bands, I want to listen to the real American sound. And Canadian hardcore, I don't want to see any band that sounds just like Japanese hardcore. Because it's enough here. Because the Japanese style, I'm fed up with it. I need to have a new way that's not so traditional. I'm maybe used to the Japanese hardcore sound, I know it, so that's enough. I need to make and find a new way that's my style; I'm still finding it.

Had you asked me at seventeen years of age if I'd still be listening to D-Beat thirty-plus years later, I can't imagine how I would have responded. From my North American perspective at that time, D-Beat (along with UK82 style punk) already seemed hopelessly retrograde and stuck in the past. I mean, I was (to my eternal everlasting shame) passing up GBH gigs in '88 as in my estimation they were terribly antiquated when seen in contrast to the hyper-speed thrash (Heresy, Ripcord, the Stupids) and gloomy metallic crust (Amebix, Sacrilege) that the UK was producing at the time. Besides, hadn't Discharge shit the bed with *Grave New World*? I loved my early Discharge records just fine, but as a musical form, I just didn't picture it having much in the way of legs.

Fast forward all these years later, however, and there is little more satisfying than seeing D-Beat executed well. While I don't need excessively studded jackets, charged hair, and an over reliance on artifice to compensate for weak riffs or a lack of chops, an attention to detail and element of care with the D-Beat craft—not to mention throwing oneself full force into the effort—continues to hit the spot no matter how redundant it may all seem at first glance. D-Beat as my punk rock comfort food? Perhaps, especially considering that knowing exactly what I'm getting well in advance doesn't make the reward any less satisfying. How bleak would punk look today had this sonic experiment dead-ended in Stoke-on-Trent and punks the world over hadn't continued to mine the ground work laid by Discharge to a myriad of absurd ends? Why somedays do I reach for a Totalitär record when on others Anti-Cimex hits the spot? Why (why, why, why, why) do I even own multiple Thisclose records? I don't bother to second guess myself too much when it comes to these matters; it's simply enough to revel in the absurdity and enjoy the ride.



GASMASK TERROR was:

Olivier (O), 38, vocals

Shiran (S), 36, guitar

Fabro (F), 38, bass

Luc (L), 44, drums

While France is not generally associated with a wealth of D-Beat bands, Gasmask Terror provided another case study in the power that can be marshalled when taking a fairly basic formula like D-Beat and excelling at it. As singer Olivier candidly admits in the interview that follows, they essentially wrote the same song again and again during their fifteen years together. Still, they managed to sustain enough of an element of surprise within the narrow confines of D-Beat predictability to keep things fresh, and played things with the requisite level of conviction. While it might be easy to dismiss D-Beat as a simple genre exercise at this stage and D-Beat bands as nothing more than tribute acts, Gasmask Terror breathed life into the the form with skill, thoughtfulness, and just the right amount of reckless precision.

I interviewed Gasmask Terror in the spring of 2018 in Tokyo on the band's final tour.

MLC: ***So you guys started this band when you were quite young, in your twenties or thereabouts...***
All: (Some laughter)
F: Well, except for some of us...
L: I'm a bit older. (Laughter)

MLC: ***I'm curious, we were talking (before the interview started) about Facebook and people getting into punk and hardcore nowadays—it's very different from getting into punk and hardcore twenty or thirty years ago. So growing up in France in particular, what form did your initial exposure to punk and hardcore take? I mean, it became such a large part of your lives, so what was it initially that made you say, "I love it and I want in"?***
O: I started going to local punk gigs simply because one of my friends in my class actually at the end of college—the beginning of high school—he was playing in a band. It was as easy as that.

O: I started going to local punk gigs simply because one of my friends in my class actually at the end of college—the beginning of high school—he was playing in a band. It was as easy as that.

MLC: ***So it was a local scene through a friend?***
O: Yes.

MLC: ***And what kind of music were they playing?***
O: The town I'm from is famous for emo actually.
L: French emo.

MLC: ***Was this like Fingerprint or something like that?***
O: Not Fingerprint but the same scene actually in the mid-nineties.

MLC: ***What about anyone else?***
S: Yeah, I grew up in a small town too. In this town there was no exposure to punk so I discovered punk through metal bands. You know like in the Thanks List in records they were name dropping some bands? And I was a little bit curious so I got into punk and hardcore this way. To study, I moved to Bordeaux, which is a bigger town, then I started to go to local gigs when I saw punk and hardcore shows and I met people there and that's how I got into the scene.

MLC: ***And again, was it local bands that you were seeing at first?***
S: Yeah.
L: Ah, that was so long ago. (Laughter) I come from a very small town in a rural area next to the Spanish border. I got exposed to punk through classmates. I was starting to get interested in music; I didn't know anything about music and these guys who were older than me—I don't know why—they started to lend me tapes. I grew up in the French side of the Basque country. Basque punk was a big thing there, like Kortatu and Eskorbuto, bands like that. So I listened to this and the French band Bérurier Noir. They were a huge band in France at this time and I got into metal at the same Metallica. It was around '86, you know *Master of Puppets* and *Reign in Blood* came out that year and I got into this from those guys.

MLC: ***My old band almost played in the Basque region in 1991, but the show was cancelled. We only played in Barcelona and Benidorm. So your gateway bands and the first bands you were into were coming from small local scenes.***
L: Some of them, some of them. The main two were Kortatu and Eskorbuto. They were two of the first punk bands that I got into.

MLC: ***So Bordeaux, is it fair to say that Bordeaux is a little more left-leaning than other parts of France a little bit?***
L: Not really.
O: Not at all.
S: It's complicated.
L: It's a pretty conservative city.
O: A very rich city.

MLC: ***Well, because of the wine or?***
O & L (in unison): Wine and slave trade.
L: It's not a very glorious past.

MLC: ***I saw that fewer people voted for Macron there than voted for a more left-wing candidate, so I guess it's only less conservative by that measure. Was your initial exposure to punk and hardcore politicized in any way or was it strictly more of a music and subculture experience?***
L: For me it was both mostly because of this band Bérurier Noir who were *very* political. They had a strong following at that time. The political thing was really linked with punk in France and it was a departure from the Chaos En France scene which was the big thing at the time. The Bérurier Noir thing was a new thing. They mixed politics with punk, which was new in France.

MLC: ***I don't recall what year that Chaos En France LP came out. I have one of them but I don't remember when it came out.***
L: Those compilations were from '82 or something, just after the UK '82 thing. (**MLC:** The *Apocalypse Chaos* compilation came out in 1982 and *Chaos En France* came out in 1983.)

MLC: ***It's interesting because it seemed like at the very beginning France had a very strong international connection. You had Skydog Records in the early '70s releasing MC5 and Iggy and the Stooges and the first Motorhead 7". And then you had some of the very early punk fests like the Damned played there very early and the Sex Pistols and the Clash played there very early.***
L: Yeah, yeah, in Mont-de-Marsan close to Bordeaux. (**MLC:** The Damned played the first Mont-de-Marsan festival in August 1976—predating the opening of the 100 Club in London by a month—and returned again in 1977 when they played alongside the Clash and the Police, among others.)
MLC: ***So it seemed like there were these really strong connections with the US in part and also with the UK, but from an outside perspective it seemed like—well, outside of maybe Metal Urbain or the Stinky Toys or Bérurier Noir —there aren't a lot of famous French bands or it didn't seem like the scene developed in the same way as it did perhaps in Germany or say in Holland. I think a lot of people look at punk in France as something that's imported.***
L: Definitely, it was a very English thing I think in the early stages, yeah.
O: Except Bérurier Noir.
L: Bérurier Noir came a bit later and it was definitely a change because they sang in French and didn't try to emulate English bands.

(Speaking of early Motorhead and Damned 7"s, who is holding the Motorhead mispress from 1978 on Stiff Records where White Line Fever and Neat Neat Neat are paired?)

F: Yes, they did something new, totally new.
L: They had their own thing, musically they didn't sound like anyone else.

MLC: ***So were they one of the first French bands that were very inspiring for you guys, was that very important?***
F: There's a lot of actually French '77 punk rock bands that are very good too.
L: Yeah, but that's more obscure stuff, Guilty Razors.
F: Yeah, Guilty Razors.
L: Gasoline, there's a lot of good stuff.
F: I think France was not very good after that when punk turned to hardcore. Hardcore, I think France was not good for that, totally not.
O: Yeah, (it was) not very interesting in France.
L: Hardcore, yeah, took a long time to take off, a long, long time.

MLC: ***Yeah, from an outside perspective that's sort of what it looked like so I was wondering if you could give me a different story.***
ALL: No, sorry.
L: I think French punk was deeply rooted in UK punk for a long time.
C: And rock and roll.
L: And they really had a hard time evolving from this. So Oi! was the big thing in France in the '80s, street punk.

MLC: ***Let me get into some band specific questions here. I read an interview with you guys where you were talking about the name Gasmask Terror and you said you took some rather generic words and put them together and you got a rather generic D-Beat name. It seemed like the goal was, "OK, we love Discharge, we love Totalitär and we want to do our tribute to that style." Now that seemed like the initial goal, but the band has been going for like 15 years...***
L: Yeah, almost 15 years.

MLC: ***OK, in my opinion I think every scene should have a D-Beat band, like I would love to have a D-Beat band in my city, but it's just not possible. But how have your goals for the band and what you express through the band changed over the years if you compare your goals at the beginning and those goals towards the end?***
L: I don't think we took it too seriously when we started out because when we chose this name it was kind of like a joke and we just wanted to play that style. But I don't think we expected the band to last for fifteen years.
S: On the first demo the lyrics were mostly about war and

S: On the first demo the lyrics were mostly about war and very cliché stuff.

MLC: ***No offense!***
O: No, that's true because that's kind of what we said it was like.
S: We played it by the rules.
L: Let's play that style by the standards.
O: I think it's important to notice that we were kind of the only band in France kind of playing that style almost.
L: At that time.
F: At that time, yeah.
O: So we didn't feel a part of the 10,000 bands doing the same thing, you know? We were just the only one in France doing the Discharge style so it was OK just to replicate, but at some point replicating can be not interesting. You know you want to evolve into something more personal, but...

MLC: ***So you're getting back to emo then?***
All: (Laughter)
O: It's *too* personal. (Laughter) We're doing the same thing and not the same thing since fifteen years actually. Which is very funny, because it's basically the same song over and over again but it's not...
L: There's little things that change.
O:...that we're a Discharge clone anymore or a Totalitär clone I think.

MLC: ***I perfectly understand and respect that because how many records do I own that sound essentially similar and I still keep buying them? It's like, "OK, give me that same type of song, AGAIN." But you were talking about lyrically starting with very standard D-Beat tropes and themes like nuclear war, genocide, indoctrination through education...***
All: (some laughter)

MLC: ***…so this is all very standard for the style, but your 2013 release 17101961 was about the Paris Massacre. There was the Algerian protest, a peaceful protest that ends with people being thrown into the Seine River and that police chief, was it Papon?***
O & L: Yes, Papon.

MLC: ***So with that release the lyrics and the topic became very, very specific and very specific to France. So I was wondering if you could speak to that a little bit and why did you choose that incident to highlight and to write about?***
O: Actually that event was connected to the war in Algeria. The Independence War for Algeria. It's a part of French history that is very, very taboo in France.
S: That's something we don't learn about in books at school.
F: It's a kind of hidden history in France.
L: Yeah, it's not really in the history books, well, for a long time it wasn't.
F: France is not proud of this part of history so...
O: When you talk about war in general like with Discharge, at some point you realize that you're part of local history and if you want to talk about war, let's talk about what happened with your country actually so let's be more specific about war. Because this incident, like the killing of—we don't actually know how many people got killed, it's several hundred for sure, maybe more—but that particular event still has echoes in nowadays history in France. Still the problem is denied by the politicians who refuse to apologize for what happened.

MLC: ***I thought there was an apology from the mayor and then years later from the prime minister or president who apologized.***
S: When one of them makes an apology, all the others say, "No, you shouldn't apologize."

MLC: ***That sounds like Japan with the Second World War. If one person says something a little apologetic than all the others say, "No, no, no!"***

(On the topic of public protest in France, no sooner had anarcho-friends begun lauding the Yellow Vest anti-austerity movement in France than alt-Right elements in Canada started co-opting the whole thing here at home. Look for ***Yellow Vests Canada Exposed*** *online if you are curious what these protests turned into here in Canada.)*

Photo: Arnaud (Unlogical Feeling)

Now you talk about it being a taboo topic, would the general public in France… Well, some countries hate to have to apologize for anything. It's almost like a fatigue sets in and people don't want to be reminded about bad parts of history. Is there still a collective sense of remorse or do people just not even want to think about these sorts of things as it relates to French history?

O: I don't know. I can't speak for the whole French population, but this incident and the war in Algeria, nobody talks about it actually so it's very hard to know what people think since nobody talks about it.

F: We've got a lot of politicians still in politics right now who were involved in this so some of them it's not good for them to speak about Algeria. So they try to cover it up in any way that they can in the history books and the media. They try to cover it up because there's going to be some backlash on them if people learn more about and search more about what happened in Algeria. We know some stuff for the right, right-wing people that did some bad shit there, but the more right-center or left people, some of them were involved there too when they were younger—they were maybe military people then—so they're OK to talk about maybe what happened in the Second World War...

MLC: ***Well that's far enough away.***

F: So maybe in fifty years, I don't know, we'll talk about it more openly, but now...

S: It's taboo, but sometimes it's talked about. Like during the last presidential election, the actual president visited Algeria and I remember during an interview or a press conference he said that the colonization of Algeria was a crime against humanity by France. It was a huge, huge...

F: Huge backlash.

S: …and he lost a lot of points in the opinion polls because of that. *(**MLC:** In September 2018--a few months after doing this interview --French President Macaron publicly acknowledged the widespread systematic and routine torture of Algerian citizens during the Algerian War of Independence. By some estimates, as many as 1.5 million Algerians lost their lives in the war.)*

MLC: ***I know that the topic of immigration is very contentious and remains a very difficult topic in France. There's the idea of immigration and then there's actual integration. And in France I guess it's been a very touchy subject with riots then with terrorist attacks. Did you see these mainstream attitudes filtering down into the punk scene or any resistance to immigration? How does that look?***

O: No.

S: I don't think so.

O: No, not in the punk scene. Because the punk scene in France is still connected to... I mean the punk scene that I belong to...

MLC: ***The DIY scene.***

O: Or not even DIY, it's still connected to anti-fascist stuff.

S: Left wing.

O: Or left wing. Yeah, you can say... I like to talk shit about punks, but you can't say that.

MLC: ***I guess I ask this in part because I have seen some older European punks on facebook where I'm surprised some of the stuff that is said about immigration issues in their countries. I mean (people expressing) attitudes that for me seem very conservative.***

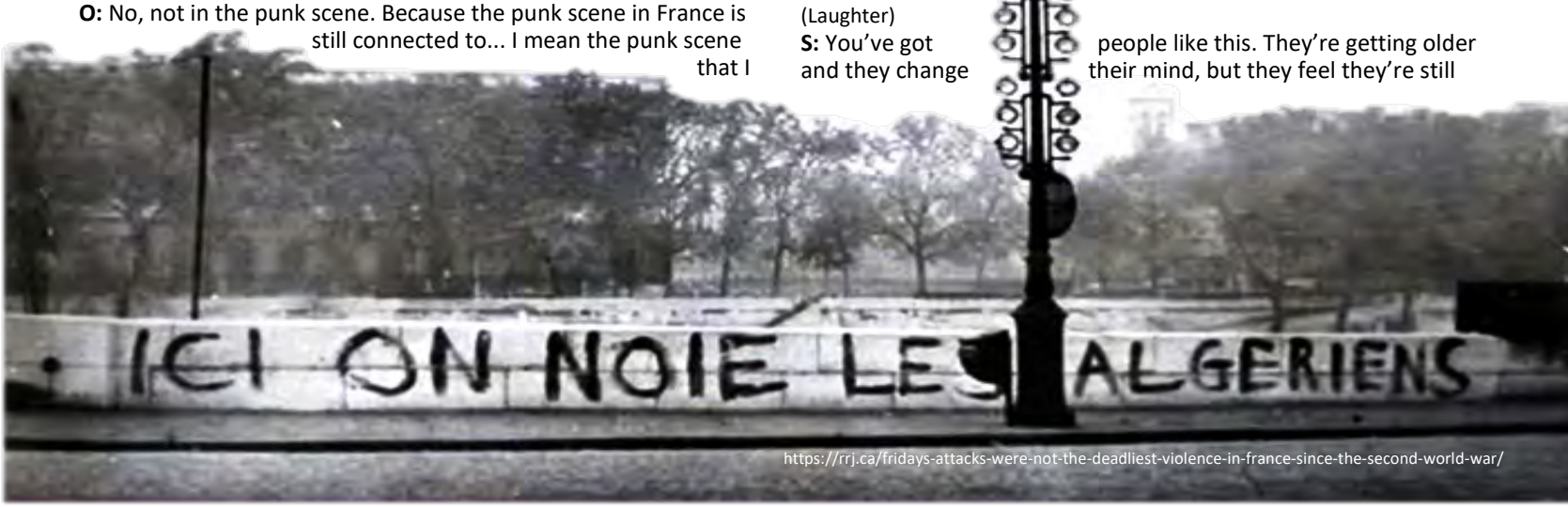
O: If somebody did that in France actually they are going to be called out very bad. Like racism is I think the ultimate offense in France in the punk scene.

MLC: ***And this is in part because of the Front National? I remember I travelled a bit in France in '87 and '88 and it was the place in Europe where I saw the most white-power graffiti and it really made an impression.***

S: Maybe there's a connection with getting older. I mean talking about punks who are getting older now and getting more right wing. Sometimes you've got people who don't feel like they got out of the scene. They used to belong to the scene and they feel connected to it but as they are getting older they start to see things differently and sometimes they don't really belong to the punk scene but they still have this idea, "Ah, I'm still a punk, but now I'm a forty-five-year-old guy and I've got responsibilities (**MLC:** As I raise my hand in agreement to this comment) and I don't want immigrants here."

MLC: (Lowering my hand) ***Oh, except for that last part!*** (Laughter)

S: You've got people like this. They're getting older and they change their mind, but they feel they're still



https://rrj.ca/fridays-attacks-were-not-the-deadliest-violence-in-france-since-the-second-world-war/

belonging to the punk scene but in fact they don't and their ideas have changed.

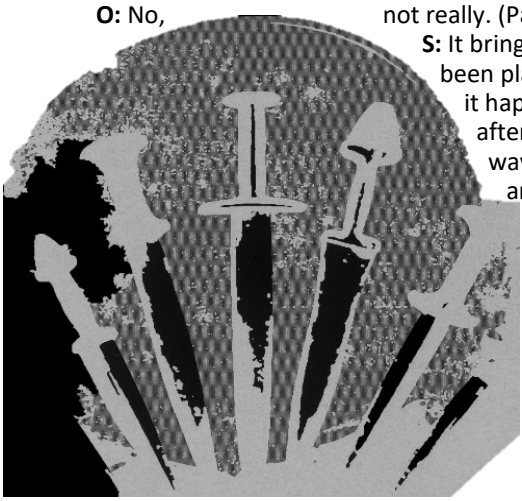
MLC: ***It's weird for me too because I wasn't born in Canada and when people say that stuff with me it's like, "I'm an immigrant." And the response is, "Well, we don't mean you." Yeah, OK, I don't have an accent, I'm white, it's like, "Well, who do you mean? Do you mean my father? Do you mean my mother? Do you mean my wife?" We're all from different countries.*** **(Changing the topic)** ***Early on in the band your early releases were all in English. Then you had a song in Swedish (and) you had a song in Portuguese. Then you had a song in German. It was only after that you released a song in French in 2010. Then your last LP was almost all in French, right?***
O: It's all in French.
L: All in French.

MLC: ***Could you talk a little bit about that transition? Why did you make that change and also, why did it take so long?***
L: That's a good question. (Laughter)
O: Because actually it's the same process with mimicking things. All the bands we listened to sing in English, like most of the bands. And then you have international hardcore in general, but no French hardcore. So it's not about we have to sing in French in hardcore in France. (Although) that's not true with the more punk stuff. So we had three songs in German, Swedish, and Portuguese and it was kind of like a tribute to international hardcore, but at some point you have to stop focusing on the international and focus more on the local things. So talking about the war in Algeria in English, it makes no sense actually.
S: Yeah, less sense.
O: You can do that but it would be weird since you talk to French people, let's talk in French actually. Yeah, on a more personal level it was kind of a challenge actually to sing in French, it's kind of hard to make it sound 'right' in hardcore.

MLC: ***Well, this is what people say.***
O: The sentences are kind of long and weird.
L: It depends on the genre of music really.
O: Yeah.
L: For the faster stuff, it's really hard to make French sound good.

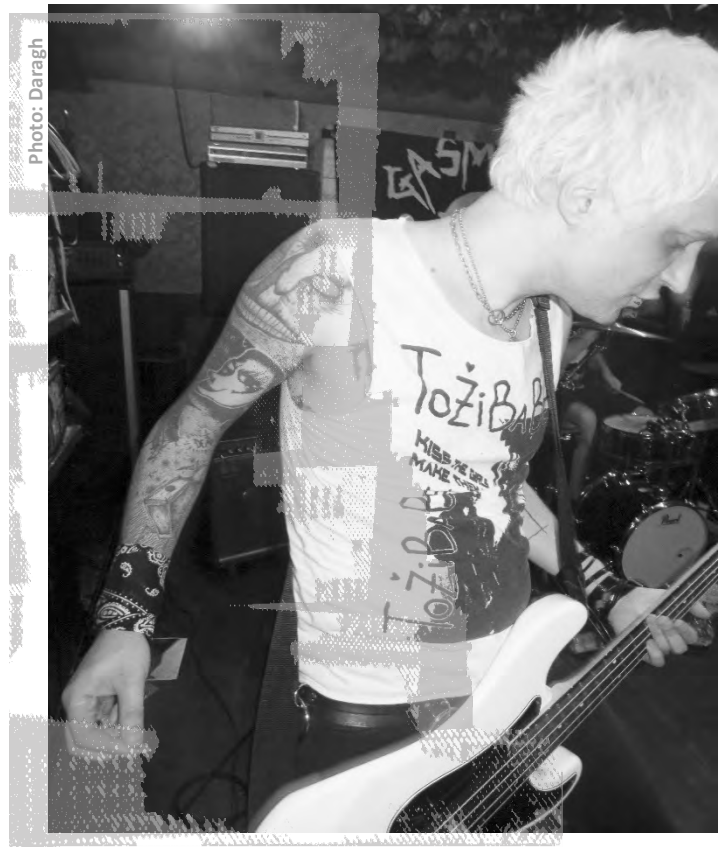
MLC: ***See, my French is so poor that I can't comment but I've heard people say that and I've always felt that, not that it was an excuse, but I felt that it was unfortunate because when you think about say Deutsche punk there's a very specific sound with the vocals and things or if you think about Italy that sounds like a language made for hardcore and I always felt that was missing or I wasn't aware of examples from France.***
O: The only (hardcore) band we had in France singing in French was Heïmat-Los actually.
L: And they only had a couple of songs. (**MLC:** Luc noted in later correspondence that while Heïmat-Los did not sing exclusively in French, the band was unique in that it also had songs in Finnish, Swedish, German, and English.)

MLC: ***(To Olivier) Did that take extra work on your part?***
O: No, not really. (Pause) Ah, no.



S: It brings fresh air also. Like we've been playing for fifteen years and it happened like in the middle after seven or eight years. In a way I think it brings fresh air and something new to the table that enhances the energy of still playing together.
O: Even with the audience actually you had something just like (snaps fingers).

MLC: ***Nice.***
O: You could feel it like singing in French people related very easily with the songs.
L: Yeah, they remember the words and they sing along.
O: It was very natural.
L: It was easier to sing along.
O: And it meant something to them not the same way an English sentence can mean something to them.
S: To me when we started to sing in French, in a way I felt that now Gas Terror is a real thing for us as opposed to the beginning we were kind of imitating and having fun. Now shit's getting serious, we are singing in French and...
O: (In his best NYHC accent) This shit's getting serious!
S: Yeah, but it's true, that's how I felt.



MLC: ***Now I'm not a French speaker myself, but when I saw that final record I was like, "Yeah! OK!" and I could just really respect it. Olivier you were talking lyrically that you're not afraid to be critical of the punk scene and what's happening in it and some of the lyrics do that. There was Åker Vi Ditt with ideas of strength and masculinity in underground communities and For Goat's Sake and things. So the band started in 2003 and it's 2018 now. What would be your main criticism of DIY punk and hardcore in 2018?***
All: Long pause
L: (To Oliver) You have a lot to say I guess.
O: Yeah, I have too much to say actually. Yeah, I pass on this one.

MLC: ***Well, if there's something that existed at some point in your participation in punk and hardcore that you feel is missing now or that has changed too much, what would that be?***
L: I feel like politics is... I don't know, there's much less politics than before.
O: It's not less politics. Politics is done differently actually and it's because of the social media. I don't know where to start actually.
L: But to me I felt like the punk scene is a good way to open your eyes on the world and to see things differently, an alternative. But if you stay stuck in these ideas, it's not necessarily a good thing for you. It's a good thing to open your eyes and see different things but if you get stuck and stay inside these ideas all your life, maybe

(I slighted mid-eighties Discharge in the intro and the recent announcement concerning MRR ceasing publication had me return to some of the earliest issues I picked up at the time. One UK scene report had the following to say about Discharge:)

it's not really you. It's the punk scene, but it's not really you. So I feel like you need to step up and say like, "OK, I don't necessarily agree with everything. I am who I am. The punk scene opened my eyes to see different things and choices." That's how I see it. And people who want to stay in the eighties' punk scene, to me it's like the opposite of what punk is.

these ideas all your life, maybe it's not really you. It's the punk scene, but it's not really you. So I feel like you need to step up and say like, "OK, I don't necessarily agree with everything. I am who I am. The punk scene opened my eyes to see different things and choices." That's how I see it. And people who want to stay in the eighties' punk scene, to me it's like the opposite of what punk is.

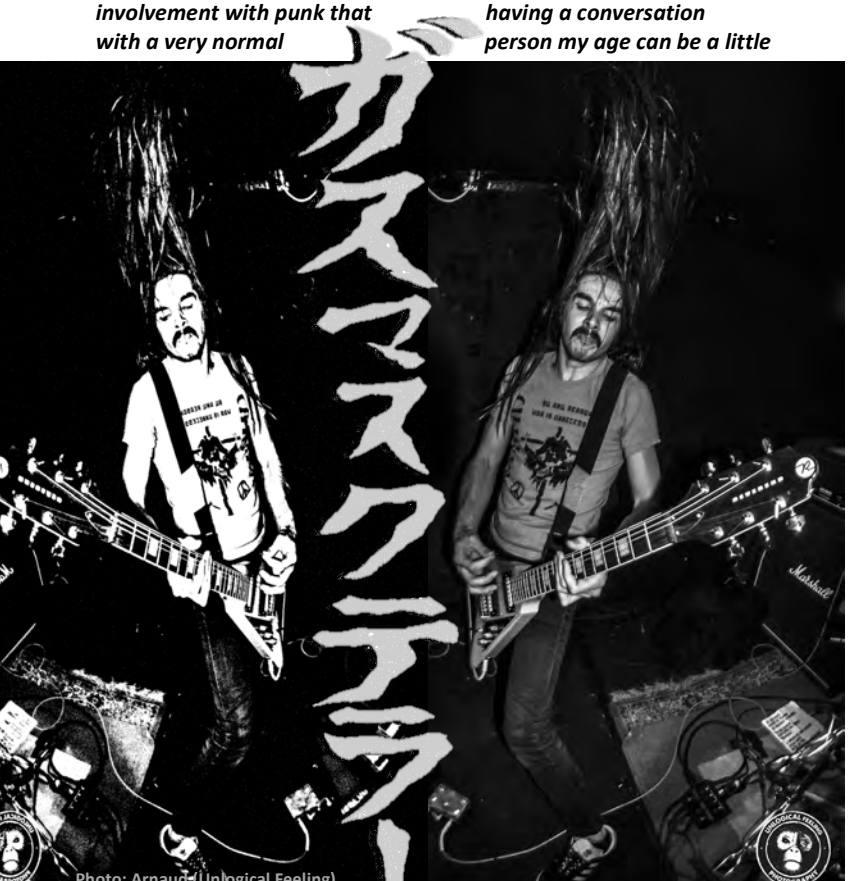
O: I think punk should develop individuality, not individualism. And there's a difference between that because I don't want to be a punk now. Actually, I don't care, I want to be Olivier. I have to disassociate myself from punk if I want to do that. I'm very negative about punk right now so...

S: It can be a good thing.

O: It's a good thing for me, and I don't want to talk too much shit about that.

S: Maybe the punk scene can be a good thing to see an alternative to open your eyes, but if you get stuck it's not good.

MLC: ***Well, when I think about the timeline for your band, at various points (during that period) I took a step back from my involvement with punk. There were a few periods where I didn't buy records, and then I was interested again, and then for a few years I was doing something else, and then I was interested again. I had the opportunity to shift my focus, but fifteen years with a band; it's a long time to have that focus. And speaking personally, my colleagues at work—some of them—were very surprised when they found out that I even liked music because I go to work, I dress up for it—I'm a college teacher—I teach, am professional, and do not have to go in (pantomiming having a mohawk with my hands) and show everybody that I'm some wild guy. But it's also very strange because I do feel that in part because of my involvement with punk that having a conversation with a very normal person my age can be a little odd. Well, because in Canada it might be (a conversation about) hockey, and I've never played. You know, I can't talk about sports. If I talk about politics, I have to be careful there too. So it's sort of made it more difficult to be an adult in some ways. Speaking of critiques, you saw the RIXE record in there (the first issue of this zine). When people talk about French punk and hardcore, RIXE and Syndrome 81 are current French bands that people would know. How are they viewed in the DIY scene in France itself? I'm wondering if people are a little bit curious as to why they have become as well known or as popular as they seem to be elsewhere. (Pause) Like I've seen RIXE twice, I think it's very catchy, it's great, but you could take a country like Japan and there could be three hundred stronger bands that maybe nobody has heard of.***



L: Yeah.

O: I think Syndrome 81 and RIXE are two different bands, *very* different bands.

MLC: ***Well, they were on that split together, or that compilation...***

O: They were on a compilation. (**MLC:** The *La Force Dans La Oi! Vol. 2* comp 7" from 2015.) Actually Syndrome 81, they were all in hardcore bands before. They're all hardcore kids basically, not skinheads. Rixe, most of the people, are really skinheads so it's really different.

MLC: ***But what does that mean now in France? Is the skinhead scene there now safe?***

S: Ah, it's a very hard topic.

F: I think it depends on the city in France.

MLC: ***So, if I went to a Rixe show in the wrong city...***

F: If you go to a Rixe show in Paris, for example, you will see a lot of violent, shitty skinheads.

O: Like not right-wing skinheads, just like...

L: No, not like white power.

O:…dumb fucking skinheads, dumb violent skinheads.

MLC: ***Violent SHARP skinheads?***

O: Sometimes, apolitical skinheads.

L: It's not really SHARP, it's like non-political skinheads.

O: Fence sitters.

F: If you go to a Syndrome 81 show, mostly you will see hardcore kids and maybe left-wing skinheads.

MLC: ***So, after fifteen years, why are you calling an end to the band?***

O: Actually I'm the one who is stopping the band because I'm moving to another city in France and I need to step back, like what I said earlier, from punk right now before I become too

["DISCHARGE have just put out a new record called "Ignorance". The 7" has two tracks and the 12" has great value for money (joke!) extended versions. It was recorded with a session guitarist and a drummer from Stoke-based country/blues (?) band called HAYMAKER." → MLC note: No relation to InfoWars HC band of the same name.]

jaded and too negative. And I think at some point I've done what I wanted to do with Gasmask Terror. We've done amazing things that I wasn't expecting at first. I mean we're in Japan for the second time and that's amazing, but that's it. I don't want to do that for my whole life. I want to do something else and...

MLC: ***Understood. Luc is shaking his head, he's thinking, "No, I want to..." But hey (to Luc), you have (your other band) Bombardement.***
O: Yeah, that's just my own decision.
L: I respect his decision.

MLC: ***Well, if you think back fifteen years ago, you gain a lot and you get a lot of great experiences doing the band, but also it requires sacrifice with your regular lives or with work or with relationships. If you could tell yourself something fifteen years ago knowing where this was going to wind up, would you say, "Yeah, go for it" or would you say, "Wait a minute, be careful because..."***
All: Go for it.
S: Yeah, go for it for sure.
O: I would say to my younger self, "Learn to warm up your voice before shows" because I just like fucked up my voice during that fifteen years on shitty PAs.

MLC: ***I'll tell you because I'm a teacher, I've lost my voice before and every time it's lasted longer and longer. The last time I lost my voice, I couldn't speak for seven weeks.***
O: Ow.

L: Wow.

MLC: ***And at that point I was just thinking, is it...***
L: Gone forever?

MLC: ***…gone forever? So, I'll finish with just a few more questions about Japan. This is your second time in Japan and I'm wondering if you could speak to any highlights. And I'm wondering, I heard the bassline for Bastard's Misery for about three seconds during your sound check, so will Tokurow be here tonight? Didn't the singer from Bastard sing with you guys in Yokohama?***
L: Yeah, he did. I don't know how it happened, but I think he heard that we played this cover the day before and he heard about it and he came to us and asked if he could sing with us.

MLC: ***And you said...***
O: Of course!
L: No problem! I almost cried that day. It was amazing.
O: Yeah, it was amazing.
L: He was super drunk.

MLC: ***Are there any highlights from this tour that you would like to talk about in Japan?***
O: This is just the beginning of that tour so... but the first show in Seoul, Korea was amazing.
L: Yeah.
S: It was our first time there.
L: A lot of people told us maybe Seoul in South Korea might be not too well attended and it might not be so good because a few friends of ours played there before and the shows were so-so.
S: And the scene is small actually.
L: It's a small scene.

MLC: ***I've never been.***
L: But it was amazing, the show was amazing.
F: A lot of people there, great bands.
L: All the bands were good, good turnout, great atmosphere, everyone was into it, it was fucking awesome. (**MLC:** Luc later noted that Gasmask Terror played with Scumraid, Slant, Bad Idols, and Find the Spot in Seoul and described all the bands as excellent regardless of subgenre.)
O: The people were funny and wild.
S: They have very good bands there. For me, it was one of the best shows we ever did. It was a lot of fun.
L: It was a big surprise. I didn't really expect anything from it, but it was awesome, we all loved it.

MLC: ***Yeah, because when I was living in Japan years ago I talked to people and it didn't seem like much was happening in South Korea then.***
O: It's a new punk scene, it's very new.
L: You have a lot of expats at shows, lots of Americans, French people, Canadians. A lot of Korean people too.

MLC: ***This could be that last question. I know you guys are into records, what's the best thing that you've found on this trip?***
L: It's too early to tell. We've been here for two days only so we haven't had time to visit stores. I'm staying for a few days after the last show so I'm expecting to find a few records.
F: So far we just have copies of the last Scumraid LP that just got released. So that's basically it.
S: But regarding Japan about the highlights, there are so many highlights but one of the main things is that the bands in Japan, most of them are... (pantomimes look of amazement)
L: It's (such) a live culture.
S: And it was game changing for us. After the first tour in Japan, we were like, "OK, we've got to..."
L: Yeah, the first tour in Japan was totally...
S: It taught us a lot.
L: Yeah.

MLC: ***It's amazing. I interviewed Lebenden Toten and in the fall and they were talking about playing with Disclose. I saw Disclose here once and what was funny was that as Kawakami was getting everything set up—and he's got like seven pedals—and the first chord he hits on his guitar and it sounds totally beautiful and warm and it just sounds like Sunn O))).***
All: Laughter

MLC: ***He hits the next pedal, next pedal, next pedal, next and live you could catch that underneath there was a really good tone and on the record (mimics hissing sound).***
S: It's different.

*["Rainy and Cal are just managing to stick together to keep the dying (coughing/sputtering/and drastically out of ideas) Discharge machine in motion, but as to how much longer they can keep it together is anybody's guess." – Source: MRR No. 27, August 1985. Scene reported submitted by **Kalv from Heresy**!]*

MLC: ***But they were talking about playing with Disclose and Disclose did this sound check for over an hour perfecting everything and then they played for fifteen minutes.***
All: Yeah. (laughter)

MLC: ***Or I think about seeing a band like Contrast Attitude.***
L: Yeah, I was going to mention them.
O: One of the best shows we ever did.
S: The first time I saw them, I cried. At a punk show. Like, what the fuck, I'm crying at a punk show.

MLC: ***I had the records and it's like, "Yeah, they're very good" but then you see them live and it's like...***
L: Yeah, live it's like next level.

MLC: ***They can really play. They came out and did this little jam to check the levels and I was just like (jaw drops), like that bassist...***
S: That bass player, holy fuck.

MLC: ***I think one thing that separates Japanese punk and hardcore from other parts of the world is that in Canada when people become that good at their instruments they play a different style of music, you know?***
All: Laughter

MLC: ***Like they just go and do something else. But in Japan people start their punk band and maybe they're amazing from the beginning***
but they keep going and just get better and better. Like think of a guitarist like Chelsea.
S: Yeah, it's crazy.

MLC: ***I remember seeing Paintbox just after the singer had been arrested and Chelsea seemed drunk and he was like, "OK, I'm a doing vocals." So Chelsea—drunk—played guitar and he sang everything. The level of musicianship and the craft, it's incredible, so I can see how that changes how you approach things yourselves.***
S: Yeah, totally.
L: Yeah.

gasmask terror

All Photos this page: Arnaud (Unlogical Feeling)

gasmask terror

Perfect Youth: The Birth of Canadian Punk

Sam Sutherland

ECW Press, 366 pages, 2012

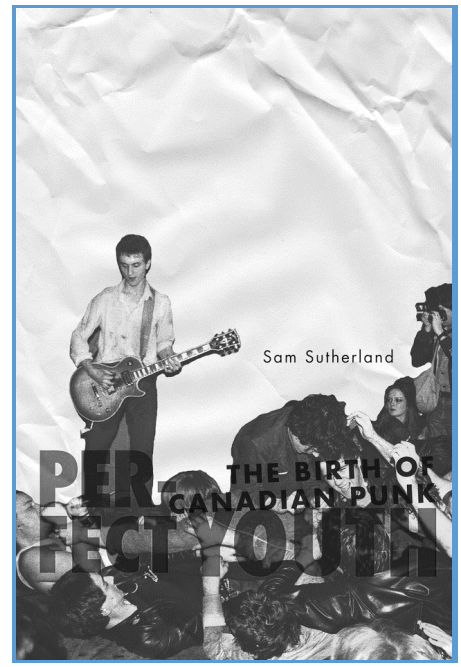
(VVARNING! Old—OLD!!!—review here, filling up space/trying to even out the page count. Obligatory Can-punk content. Written, submitted to/not run by MRR in 2012. Perfect Youth can still be found online)

When I first spied an advance copy of Sam Sutherland's *Perfect Youth: The Birth of Canadian Punk* at a friend's house, it wasn't without a hint of trepidation that I asked, "Is it good?" A common lament among participants in the first wave of Canadian punk is that while scenes such as Toronto were every bit as creative and robust as what could be found elsewhere at the time, they remain overlooked due to a lack of recorded artifacts, infrequent attempts at touring on the part of many bands, and a paucity of documentation when compared to contemporaneous scenes in New York or London in the U.K. That someone was finally rising to the challenge of documenting the early years of Canadian punk was certainly intriguing, but some apprehension existed as to whether Sutherland, writer at national indie-rock monthly *Exclaim!* by day, had the bona fides to pull it off.

First off, a book of this nature is definitely long overdue. As Sutherland points out in his introduction, Canada is home to any number of North American punk firsts, be it in the form of one of North America's first self-released punk records (a 7" by the short-lived Toronto band Zoom in the spring of 1977, scant months after the Buzzcocks' self-released "Spiral Scratch" single), North America's first all-female punk band courtesy of Toronto's the Curse, Vancouver's D.O.A. being perhaps the first dub their sound "hardcore" back in 1981, or Toronto's the Dishes setting a crucial early precedent for the North American queercore scene that followed years later. By the same token, many would undoubtedly view the prospect of writing about Canadian punk's formative years from coast to coast as too daunting a task and a subject simply too unwieldy in scope. The vast distances separating scenes often precluded any cross-pollination from one region to the next, and it is to Sutherland's credit that he resists trying to impose any one-size-fits-all narrative over the subject matter of this work. Instead, we get easily digestible chapters breaking things down into geographical regions from Victoria in the far West—think the Neos, Dayglo Abortions, and NoMeansNo; to the East Coast—with an emphasis on the Punks, Agro, Nobody's Heroes, and the Curbs; as well as numerous points in between. In cases where either recorded output or infamy merit a more in-depth look, bands such as the Viletones, the Diodes, D.O.A., the Forgotten Rebels, and Teenage Head are all given the separate chapter treatment. Sutherland clearly covers a lot of ground in the book's 366 pages.

Compared to other recent Canpunk chronicles, Sutherland eschews the straight oral history format favored by Liz Worth (2009) in *Treat Me Like Dirt* while simultaneously being less exhaustive in his coverage of key acts than Chris Walters in his separate volumes devoted to Personality Crisis (2008), the Dayglo Abortions (2010), and a recently published entry on SNFU (2012). *(**2019 interjection:** I was originally going to include a rather critical and dismissive review of the Randy Rampage/Chris Walters'* I Survived D.O.A. *book this time out, but it would have come across as needlessly harsh in light of Rampage's passing in 2018.)* While Sutherland's take on bands like D.O.A. might not be as exhaustive as what can be found elsewhere, the book still manages to add a few amusing anecdotes to our collective punk memories of well-established acts and will definitely provide a nice short list of previously unheard bands to investigate.

While it is clear to anyone reading the book that Sutherland is first and foremost a fan, he is far from sycophantic and does not shy away from pointing out inconsistencies in interviewees' testimonies where they exist. I would even venture that one of the strengths of the book lies in the fact that Sutherland was not a real-time participant in the first wave of punk in the country. As a result, he seems less invested in the few rivalries mentioned and can strike a more objective and perhaps less reverential tone when confronted with some of the larger than life personalities that populate *Perfect Youth*. Furthermore, Sutherland's intermittent analysis allows us to consider the wider impact punk had on the country's cultural and physical landscape. Whether it be the role punk had in transforming derelict neighborhoods into the hipster stomping grounds and prime real estate of today or the very machinations of the live club circuit—to say nothing of establishing the DIY touring network that shuns bars entirely—Sutherland is clear to note the transformative effects of punk's arrival. Posting gig flyers on telephone poles? Nascent queercore band the Dishes from Toronto did it first. Establishing opportunities for non-union musicians to play live in Halifax and Ottawa? Credit Nobody's Heroes and The Rotters Club. Booking a single show in a city rather than a week-long residency playing nothing but covers? Thank any number of early punk bands that had the mettle to take their show on the road.



While *Perfect Youth* does consider how geographical isolation, inhospitable winters, and an indifferent recording industry conspired to deal bands a harsher hand than they may have received stateside, the book had me mulling over some other distinguishing features of the early Canadian punk scene. One gets the impression that when not mining familiar punk tropes such as alienation and boredom, Canadian bands either responded to very local concerns—take for example the murder of a 12 year old male hustler in Toronto in 1977 (the Curse's "Shoeshine Boy")—or looked to America when in need of a more obvious political or cultural whipping boy. So, when D.O.A. wrote "Fucked Up Ronnie," does it speak to the influence of U.S. politics above the 49th parallel or perhaps the lack of an all-encompassing political boogeyman and less repressive political climate in the north at the time? Whereas U.S. punks were just beginning their love/HATE relationship with Reagan at the tail end of the period in question, Canada had in Pierre Trudeau a Prime Minister who (when not being tricked into posing with a Forgotten Rebels record at a 1980 Liberal Party fundraiser in Hamilton) legalized abortion, decriminalized homosexuality, visited Castro, and saw to it that Canada became the first country in the world to embrace multiculturalism as official government policy. Sutherland also references overt political protest that ranges from the farcical, such as the intoxicated Dayglos offending *both* sides of a pro-choice/pro-life rally, to the direct action bombing campaign in which the Subhumans' Gerry Hannah was a co-conspirator. I also feel that Sutherland's treatment of the ties between the country's queer culture and early punk scene is worth mentioning. As Sutherland notes, gay clubs were often extremely supportive allies of the emerging punk scene in that they offered this new group on the social margins a place to congregate and perform. Indeed, the Dishes front man Murray Ball notes that being an openly gay man in the late 70's Toronto punk scene was more than merely tolerated—it was perceived as an asset that enabled the band to expand their audience. Further, as Don Pyle (*Trouble in the Camera Club* author and member of first-generation punk band Crash Kills Five) attests in *Perfect Youth*, the roots of the original Toronto scene lay very much in part in the more forward-thinking elements of the local art and gay communities. This point is made all the more salient when even members of decidedly politically incorrect outfits such as the Forgotten Rebels and the Dayglo Abortions speak of their sense of allegiance with members of their local gay communities. *(**2019 interjection:** While my appreciation of the dumb genius of bands like the Ramones only increases with time, can 2019 be the year when willfully stupid "What?-Can't-you-take-a-joke?" bands with "ironic" offensive lyrics please finally fuck off for good?)*

One of the more enjoyable aspects of *Perfect Youth* is the steady stream of nerdy punk rock trivia on offer. Suffice it to say that the seven degrees of Canadian punk rock separation somehow manage to include Bill Clinton, two

Canadian Prime Ministers, Steven Spielberg, Metallica, Norah Jones, U2, Christopher (*Dark Knight*) Nolan, Ricky (*The Office*) Gervais, and a Toronto punk living in the room adjacent to Sid and Nancy on the night that the latter was murdered. Without a doubt, part of the book's charm is seeing the various high (and low) places where some of the first wave of Canadian punks actually wound up. And as with any punk history worth its salt, space is devoted to the seedy dives that intermittently hosted punk gigs, run-ins with rednecks, the occasional brawl, substance abuse and attendant minor crime sprees, flag burning (D.O.A. *and* the Forgotten Rebels), and seemingly endless recounting of bands' first gigs ending in riots. To be sure, the shock value commonly associated with first wave punk is also on display in both the offstage antics and lyrics of some of the featured bands, little of which would pass muster today with audiences more attuned to the fine lines separating humor, pushing people's buttons to foster debate, and controversy-inviting idiocy with publicity as its primary goal. Having said that, *Perfect Youth* never approaches the level of salaciousness found in say McNeil and McCain's (1996) *Please Kill Me* (well, save for one particularly insalubrious story about a West Coast punk fistfucking a policeman—"Fuck da pigs" indeed!) nor embraces the thuggish idiocy or lame sexism of Steven Blush's (2001) *American Hardcore*. If anything, one gets the impression that Sutherland strives to avoid controversy or coming across as too judgmental whenever participants' foibles, whether personal or lyrical in nature, enter the narrative. Hell, one could argue that all this civility imbues *Perfect Youth* with a tone that is rather Canadian in character as a result. (One journalist quoted in the book actually opines that the country will never produce a legitimate punk band as the form itself is simply un-Canadian.) For example, is there not perhaps something quintessentially Canuck about an early incarnation of D.O.A. telling a drunken audience in a remote logging town to fuck off, only to be spared a beating by quickly jumping back on the stage to apologize? Similarly, the near riots caused by Hot Nasties performances at a prison and again at the Calgary Stampede seem all the more incongruous considering that founding member (and *Fury's Hour* author) Warren Kinsella would morph into a political operative for the federal Liberal Party and a nationally syndicated political affairs columnist, all while remaining punk-as-fuck at heart. ***(2019 interjection:*** *Though as anyone who follows Kinsella online will know, he has no love whatsoever for the Trudeau Liberals currently leading the country.)* On this note, although Sutherland readily acknowledges that not everyone he approached would consent to an interview, you really have to admire his resolve in not only tracking down present-day barflies for their take on events, but also getting corporate lawyers and real estate moguls to reminisce and share as much as they do.

Not surprisingly given its length, there remains a lot of ground that *Perfect Youth* does not cover. It does not pretend to offer anything even approaching an ethnographic study of the people involved, and issues of race or even linguistic identity in the case Francophone and Anglophone punks in Quebec are never addressed. This is chiefly a book about the music and the resolve of those who produced it to stake out their own cultural space. While it is generally believed that the leap from fan to performer in punk is never all that large, the voices and experiences of those not playing the music or managing and booking the bands are generally left unexplored. I say this not in an attempt at criticism, but merely to clarify Sutherland's scope. As stated, Sutherland is clearly a fan and thus avoids any rush to conclusions (not to mention factual inaccuracies and gross overgeneralizations) that can often occur when academics try their hands at unraveling the punk rock onion. This is, thankfully, more a book for nerdy punks than actual professors.

In terms of presentation, while the photography is almost uniformly great, the inclusion of more than a single image per chapter would have been welcome. I also found the omission of any flyers somewhat odd given the references to how instant punk art helped alter the look and feel of the urban landscape. While I can appreciate that a warts-and-all presentation might dissuade the casual reader, the punk completist in me takes issue with the clean less-is-more visual approach. ***(2019 interjection:*** *In contrast, check out the photo-and-ephemera-rich* Tomorrow is Too Late: Toronto Hardcore Punk in the '80s *book on UXB Press, a document of Toronto punk that will likely never be surpassed in terms of both depth and quality.)*

As a final qualification, I sometimes wonder whether a uniquely Canadian inferiority complex predisposes us to champion our cultural products above and beyond their actual merits. It's certainly fair to wonder if Sutherland indulges in some hyperbole here and there when discussing the relative virtues of some of the bands and their music, but when talking punk history I'd argue that any consideration of the surrounding context can't help but affect our appreciation of the art. ***(2019 interjection:*** *And that minus that context, a lot of the music is left pretty wanting! Still, for any number of reasons, punk continues to push a lot of the right musical buttons for me.)* Without wishing to directly enter into any debate as to whether or not the Viletones could have been as big as the Pistols if they'd been from the UK and had a Malcolm McLaren overseeing their career (though I'll definitely take the atavistic snarl of "Screaming Fist" over "Anarchy in the UK" any day), or if Teenage Head should be as universally revered as the Ramones, readers in Canada need only ask ourselves if musical icons like the Tragically Hip (a massive band in Canada who barely register elsewhere in the world) would be the subject of such fawning adulation if they were an import rather than a homegrown sensation. Without getting too Hamlet on everyone's asses here, doth Canadian punks protest too much when arguing that they haven't gotten their due? While there's no denying the talent and wasted potential of artists such as Art Bergman (Young Canadians) or even Ken Chinn (aka SNFU's Chi Pig), similar claims could be made of an untold number of early punk troubadours who were simply too far ahead of (or is it behind?) their time. If we're talking about first generation punk, shit was no doubt tough all over.

No matter how well-intentioned and impeccably researched, projects of this nature are almost always bound to invite a bit of controversy due to the constraints variously imposed by space, the willingness and availability of interviewees, or even a lack of hard information so many years after the fact. In particular, it is easy to invite charges that the participants or the period in question have been misrepresented when people have invested many of their formative years or even staked a large part of their identities in something as personal and idiosyncratic as punk. As Sutherland freely admits, there *are* omissions from his work and not everyone will agree with his conclusions. On that note, I'd wager that many will not even need a copy of the book in hand to bemoan the wholesale omission of any number of amazing first wave Canadian scenes and bands. Not that it will placate the critics, but Sutherland could have easily doubled the page count of *Perfect Youth* and still not have arrived at any final definitive word on a subject as large as early Canadian punk. Certainly, much more remains to be written about the bands and scenes covered herein as well as numerous neglected gems, to say nothing of the absence of any comprehensive work detailing the birth of hardcore in Canada. At the very least, *Perfect Youth* could be viewed as a rather accomplished addition to the growing CanPunk literary canon alongside the aforementioned works by Liz Worth, Don Pyle, and Chris Walters, to say nothing of recent documentaries such as *Bloodied but Unbowed* covering early West Coast punk or *MTL PUNK: The First Wave* doing the same for Montreal. Leaving it at that, however, isn't giving *Perfect Youth* its due. Sutherland definitely had his work cut out for him when he started down the path that cumulated in *Perfect Youth* and the six years he invested in this project definitely shows. Sure, you might be drawn to this book because it is the first of its kind to delve into early Canadian punk as a national phenomenon, but in all likelihood you'll love reading it because it has so much to offer. Putting aside for a moment how sparse the literature on early Canadian punk remains, *Perfect Youth* easily ranks up there with any of the better historical surveys that have been published on North American Punk to date, period. If you are even a casual fan of early Canadian punk or just eager to dive into a relatively unmined corner of our history, you will want this book.

(STOP THE PRESS! —*Although I mention it in passing above, let me state unequivocally here that if I could own ONLY ONE book on Canadian punk, it would be* **Tomorrow is Too Late: Toronto Hardcore Punk in the 1980s**, published by UXB Press. Very few copies of the second run of the book remain, so don't sleep and try getting yours at **https://uxbpresscanada.bigcartel.com/)**

(Reunion shows & nostalgia-only punk are generally pretty weak. Going to see some Toronto bands from the '80s—bands I truly loved the first time out—reunite for the Tomorrow is Too Late *book launch basically cemented my opinion that punk is played best by the young, or at the very least by people who have maintained some level of active involvement with the music and scene. All that aside, I don't think I've ever enjoyed a reunion show more than the one I saw by Youth Youth Youth—pictured right—at Fucked Up Weekend 2009. Youth YYY: always & forever my favourite Canadian punk band.)*

Here Comes The New Punk
AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BRITISH OI!, STREETPUNK, REAL PUNK, AND ASSOCIATED BACK STREET HEROES
(Books A-Z, discographies, and a whole load more besides)

MIDLIFECRISISERAHC VOL.2

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

GAUZE, ENZYME, IMPALERS, UNARM, RASHOMON (SORTA), 2017 #1 MOST FUN W/ PRE-MLCERAHC/FUTURE PAPA 1985

PHOTOS BY DARAGH (NOT A PHOTOGRAPHER) ALL TAKEN WITHIN THE LAST FEW YEARS

PUNX IS 100% RECYCLED PAPER STOCK